On Viol and Flute

00046781

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

FIRDAUSI IN EXILE, AND OTHER POEMS. 1885.

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ON VIOL AND FLUTE.

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To

THE VISCOUNTESS WOLSELEY.

AMONG your daggers, helms and drums
Find room for this frail guest that comes—
This bunch of pale chrysanthemums.

An hour or two its blooms may give
That laurel in whose shade you live
A whiteness faint and fugitive.

Nov., 1889.

PREFATORY NOTE.

THIS collection contains all that the author desires to preserve of such of his verses as were published, up to the year 1879, in certain volumes, all of which are now out of print. It is uniform with the later volume, *Firdausi in Exile, and other Poems.*

The frontispiece was designed for this edition by L. ALMA TADEMA, R.A., and the tailpiece by HAMO THORNYCROFT, R.A.

CONTENTS.

PAGE

Whitethroat 1
Return of the Swallows 6
Apotheosis of St. Dorothy 9
in the Grass 14
nate Love. In Sonnets and Rondels:—
I. First Sight 19
II. Elation 21
III. In Church-Time 22
IV. Dejection and Delay 23
V. Expectation 24
VI. In the Grass 25
II. Reservation 26
I. By the Well 27
May-Day 28
Mistrust 29
Eavesdropping 30
A Garden-Piece 31
I. Confident Love 32
IV. Lover's Quarrel 33
XV. Reconciliation 34
XVI. The Fear of Death 35
XVII. Experience 36

Fortunate Love—*continued.*
XVIII. The Exchange
XIX. Under the Apple-Tree
XX. Epithalamium
The Mænad's Grave
A Year
The Almond Tree
On Dartmoor
The Tomb of Sophocles
February in Rome
Greece and England
The Burden of Delight
The Mandrakes
Euthanasia
The Praise of Dionysus
The Loss of the "Eurydice"
Serenade
To Henrik Ibsen in Dresden
The Sisters
The Farm
The Pipe-Player
In the Bay
The Ballad of Dead Cities
The Bath
The New Endymion
Wind of Provence
Rondeau
Moorland
The Golden Isles
Sunshine before Sunrise
Song

PAGE
. 168
ute found in a Sarcophagus 171
from "King Erik" 172
from "The Unknown Lover" 174
A Birthday Gift of Webster's Plays 176
. 177
eek 178
G. R. 181
my Daughter Teresa 182
one 185
Well 188
ume 190
nelle 191
-71 193
derium 197
Suppliant 200
Houseleek 201
own Grave 204
logue 211

THE WHITETHROAT.

I HEARD the Whitethroat sing
Last eve at twilight when the wind was dead,
And her sleek bosom and her fair smooth head
Vibrated, ruffling, and her olive wing
Trembled. So soft her song was that it seemed
As though, in wandering through the copse at noon,
She must have found the holy bough where dreamed
The day-struck Nightingale,
And, listening, must have overheard too soon
The dim rehearsal of that golden tale
That greets the laggard moon.

But through the imitative strain,
Between each gentle cadence, and again

When those clear notes she tried, for which her throat
Was not so capable as fain,
I joyed to hear her own peculiar note
Through all the music float.
And when the gentle song, that streamed away,
Like some enamoured rivulet that flows
Under a night of leaves and flowering may,
Died on the stress of its own lovely pain,
Even as it died away,
It seemed as if no influence could restrain
The notes from welling in the Whitethroat's brain;
But with the last faint chords, on fluttering wing
She rose, until she hung in sunset air;
A little way she rose, as if her care
Were all to reach the heavens, her radiant goal,
Then sank among the leaves.
Pathetic singer! with no strength to sing,
And wasted pinions far too weak to bear
The body's weight that mars the singing soul,
In wild disorder, see, her bosom heaves!
Scarcely, with quivering plumes,

She wins the sparse bough of that tulip-tree,
Whose leaves unfinished ape her faulty song,
Whose mystic flowers her delicate minstrelsy.
But, hark! how her rich throat resumes
Its broken music, and the garden blooms
Around her, and the flower that waited long,
The vast magnolia, rends its roseate husk,
And opens to the dusk;
Odour and song embalm the day's decline.
Ah! pulsing heart of mine,
Flattered beyond all judgment by delight,
This pleasing harmony, this gentle light,
This soft and enervating breeze of flowers,
This magic antechamber of the night
With florid tapestry of twilight hours,
Is this enough for thee?
Lo! from the summit of the tulip-tree
The enamoured Whitethroat answered "Yes! O yes!"
And once again, with passion and the stress
Of thoughts too tender and too sad to be
Enshrined in any melody she knew,

She rose into the air;
And then, oppressed with pain too keen to bear,
Her last notes faded as she downward flew.

And she was silent. But the night came on;
A whisper rose among the giant trees,
Between their quivering topmost boughs there shone
The liquid depths of moonlight-tinted air;
By slow degrees
The darkness crept upon me unaware.
The enchanted silence of the hours of dew
Fell like a mystic presence more and more,
Awing the senses. Then I knew,
But scarcely heard, thrilled through to the brain's core,
The shrill first prelude of triumphant song,
Cleaving the twilight. Ah! we do thee wrong,
Unequalled Philomela, while thy voice
We hear not; every gentle song and clear
Seems worthy of thee to our poor noonday choice.
But when thy true fierce music, full of pain,
And wounded memory, and the tone austere

Of antique passion, fills our hearts again,
We marvel at our light and frivolous ear.
Ah ! how they answer from the woodland glades !
How deep and rich the waves of music pour
On night's enchanted shore !
From star-lit alleys where the elm-tree shades
The hare's smooth leverets from the moon's distress,
From pools all silvered o'er,
Where water-buds their petals upward press,
Vibrating with the song, and stir, and shed
Their inmost perfume o'er their shining bed,
Yea, from each copse I hear a bird,
As by a more than mortal woe undone,
Sing, as no other creature ever sang,
Since through the Phrygian forest Atys heard
His wild compeers come fluting one by one,
Till all the silent uplands rang and rang.

THE RETURN OF THE SWALLOWS.

"OUT in the meadows the young grass springs,
Shivering with sap," said the larks, "and we
Shoot into air with our strong young wings,
Spirally up over level and lea;
Come, O swallows, and fly with us
Now that horizons are luminous!
Evening and morning the world of light,
Spreading and kindling is infinite!"

Far away, by the sea in the south,
The hills of olive and slopes of fern
Whiten and glow in the sun's long drouth,
Under the heavens that beam and burn;
And all the swallows were gathered there

Flitting about in the fragrant air,
And heard no sound from the larks, but flew
Flashing under the blinding blue.

Out of the depths of their soft rich throats
Languidly fluted the thrushes, and said:
"Musical thought in the mild air floats,
Spring is coming and winter is dead!
Come, O Swallows, and stir the air,
For the buds are all bursting unaware,
And the drooping eaves and the elm-trees long
To hear the sound of your low sweet song."

Over the roofs of the white Algiers,
Flashingly shadowing the bright bazaar,
Flitted the swallows, and not one hears
The call of the thrushes from far, from far;
Sighed the thrushes; then, all at once,
Broke out singing the old sweet tones,
Singing the bridal of sap and shoot,
The tree's slow life between root and fruit.

But just when the dingles of April flowers
Shine with the earliest daffodils,
When, before sunrise, the cold clear hours
Gleam with a promise that noon fulfils,—
Deep in the leafage the cuckoo cried,
Perched on a spray by a rivulet side,
Swallows, O Swallows, come back again,
To swoop, and herald the April rain.

And something awoke in the slumbering heart
Of the alien birds in their African air,
And they paused, and alighted, and twittered apart,
And met in the broad white dreamy square,
And the sad slave woman, who lifted up
From the fountain her broad-lipped earthen cup,
Said to herself, with a weary sigh,
"To-morrow the swallows will northward fly!"

THE APOTHEOSIS OF ST. DOROTHY.

A MAIDEN wandering from the east,
  A saint immaculately white,
  I saw in holy dream last night,
Who rode upon a milk-white beast;
  Across the woods her shadow fell,
  And wrought a strange and silent spell,
    A miracle.

With firm-set eyes, and changeless face,
  She passed the cities one by one;
  Her hair was coloured like the sun,
And shed a glory round the place;
  Where'er she came, she was so fair,
  That men fell down and worshipped there
    In silent prayer.

And ever in her sacred hands
She bore a quaintly carven pyx,
Of serpentine and sardonyx,
The wonder of those eastern lands;
Wherein were laid, preserved in myrrh,
The gifts of vase and thurifer
She bore with her.

And after many days she came
To that high mountain, where are built
The towers of Sarras, carved and gilt
And fashioned like thin spires of flame:
Then like a traveller coming home,
She let her mild-eyed palfrey roam,
And upward clomb.

Oh! then methought the turrets rang
With shouting joyous multitudes,
And through the tumult, interludes
Of choral hosts, that played and sang;
Such welcome, since the world hath been,

To singer, prophetess or queen,
Was never seen.

The golden gates were opened wide;
The city seemed a lake of light,
For chrysopras and chrysolite
Were wrought for walls on every side;
Without the town was meet for war,
But inwardly each bolt and bar
Shone like a star.

Then, while I wondered, all the sky
Above the city broke in light,
And opened to my startled sight
The heavens immeasurably high,
A glorious effluence of air,
And shining ether, pure and rare,
Divinely fair.

And, rising up amid the spires,
I saw the saintly maiden go,

In splendour like new-fallen snow,
That robs the sun-rise of its fires;
So pure, so beautiful she was,
And rose like vapoury clouds that pass
From dewy grass.

Between her hands, the pyx of gold
She held up like an offering sent
To Him, who holds the firmament
And made the starry world of old;
It glimmered like the golden star
That shines on Christmas eve afar,
Where shepherds are.

And clouds of angels, choir on choir,
Bowed out of heaven to welcome her,
And poured upon her nard and myrrh,
And bathed her forehead in white fire,
And waved in air their gracious wings,
And smote their kindling viol-strings
In choral rings.

But she, like one who swoons and sees,
A vision just before he dies,
With quivering lips and lustrous eyes
Gazed up the shining distances;
But soon the angels led her on
Where fiercer cloudy splendour shone,
And she was gone.

And then a voice cried :—"This is she
Who through great tribulation trod
A thorny pathway up to God,
The blessed virgin Dorothy.
Still to the blessed Three-in-One
Be glory, honour, worship done
Beneath the sun!"

LYING IN THE GRASS.

To T. H.

Between two golden tufts of summer grass,
I see the world through hot air as through glass,
And by my face sweet lights and colours pass.

Before me, dark against the fading sky,
I watch three mowers mowing, as I lie:
With brawny arms they sweep in harmony.

Brown English faces by the sun burnt red,
Rich glowing colour on bare throat and head,
My heart would leap to watch them, were I dead!

And in my strong young living as I lie,
I seem to move with them in harmony,—
A fourth is mowing, and the fourth am I.

The music of the scythes that glide and leap,
The young men whistling as their great arms sweep,
And all the perfume and sweet sense of sleep,

The weary butterflies that droop their wings,
The dreamy nightingale that hardly sings,
And all the lassitude of happy things,

Is mingling with the warm and pulsing blood
That gushes through my veins a languid flood
And feeds my spirit as the sap a bud.

Behind the mowers, on the amber air,
A dark-green beech-wood rises, still and fair,
A white path winding up it like a stair.

And see that girl, with pitcher on her head,
And clean white apron on her gown of red,—
Her even-song of love is but half-said:

She waits the youngest mower. Now he goes;
Her cheeks are redder than a wild blush-rose;
They climb up where the deepest shadows close.

But though they pass and vanish, I am there;
I watch his rough hands meet beneath her hair,
Their broken speech sounds sweet to me like prayer.

Ah! now the rosy children come to play,
And romp and struggle with the new mown hay;
Their clear high voices sound from far away.

They know so little why the world is sad,
They dig themselves warm graves and yet are glad;
Their muffled screams and laughter make me mad!

I long to go and play among them there;
Unseen, like wind, to take them by the hair,
And gently make their rosy cheeks more fair.

The happy children! full of frank surprise,
And sudden whims and innocent ecstasies;
What godhead sparkles from their liquid eyes!

No wonder round those urns of mingled clays
That Tuscan potters fashioned in old days,
And coloured like the torrid earth ablaze,

We find the little gods and loves portrayed,
Through ancient forests wandering undismayed,
And fluting hymns of pleasure unafraid.

They knew, as I do now, what keen delight
A strong man feels to watch the tender flight
Of little children playing in his sight.

I do not hunger for a well-stored mind,
I only wish to live my life, and find
My heart in unison with all mankind.

My life is like the single dewy star
That trembles on the horizon's primose-bar,—
A microcosm where all things living are.

And if, among the noiseless grasses, Death
Should come behind and take away my breath,
I should not rise as one who sorroweth;

For I should pass, but all the world would be
Full of desire and young delight and glee,
And why should men be sad through loss of me?

The light is flying ; in the silver-blue
The young moon shines from her bright window through :
The mowers are all gone, and I go too.

FORTUNATE LOVE.

IN SONNETS AND RONDELS.

I.

FIRST SIGHT.

WHEN first we met the nether world was white
And on the steel-blue ice before her bower
I skated in the sunrise for an hour,
Till all the grey horizon, gulphed in light,
Was red against the bare boughs black as night;
Then suddenly her sweet face like a flower,
Enclosed in sables from the frost's dim power,
Shone at her casement, and flushed burning bright
When first we met!
My skating being done, I loitered home,
And sought that day to lose her face again;

But Love was weaving in his golden loom
My story up with hers, and all in vain
I strove to loose the threads he spun amain
When first we met.

II.

ELATION.

LIKE to some dreaming and unworldly child
  Who sits at sunset in the midst of hope,
  When all the windows of the west lie ope,
Flooding the air with splendour undefiled,
And sees, by fancy in a trance beguiled,
  An angel mount the perilous burning slope,
  Winning the opal and the sapphire cope,
And laughs for very joy and yearning wild ;—
So I, in whose awakening spirit Love
  Rules uninvited, not to be controlled,
  Am happiest when I struggle not, but hold
My windows open and my heart above,
  Watching, with soul not bowed nor over-bold,
The stately air with which his footsteps move.

III.

IN CHURCH-TIME.

I TOOK my flute among the primroses
That lined the hill along the brown church-wall,
For she was there; till shades began to fall,
I piped my songs out like a bird at ease,
When suddenly the distant litanies
Ceased, and she came, and passed beyond recall,
And left me throbbing, heart and lips and all
And vanished down the vistaed cypress-trees;
Ah! sweet, that motion of harmonious limbs
Drove all my folly hence, but left me faint!
Oh! be not, my desire, so wholly saint,
That I must woo thee to the rhythm of hymns!
Ah! me, my dizzy brain dissolves and swims!
And all my body thrills with fond constraint!

IV.

DEJECTION AND DELAY.

CANST thou not wait for Love one flying hour,
O heart of little faith? are fields not green
Because their rolling bounty is not seen?
Will beauty not return with the new flower?
Because the tir'd sun seeks the deep sea-bower
Where sleep and Tethys tenderly convene,
While purple night unfurls her starry screen,
Shall sunlight no more thrill the world with power?
True Love is patient ever; by the brooks
He hath his winter-dreams, a fluent choir,
And waits for summer to revive again;
He knows that by-and-by the woodland-nooks
Will overflow with blossoming green fire,
And swooping swallows herald the warm rain.

V.

EXPECTATION.

WHEN flower-time comes and all the woods are gay,
When linnets chirrup and the soft winds blow,
Adown the winding river I will row,
And watch the merry maidens tossing hay,
And troops of children shouting in their play,
And with my thin oars flout the fallen snow
Of heavy hawthorn-blossom as I go,
And shall I see my love at fall of day
When flower-time comes?
Ah, yes! for by the border of the stream
She binds red roses to a trim alcove,
And I may fade into her summer-dream
Of musing upon love,—nay, even seem
To be myself the very god of love,
When flower-time comes!

VI.

IN THE GRASS.

OH ! flame of grass, shot upward from the earth,
  Keen with a thousand quivering sunlit fires,
  Green with the sap of satisfied desires
And sweet fulfilment of your sad pale birth,
Behold ! I clasp you as a lover might,
  Roll on you, bathing in the noon-day sun,
  And, if it might be, I would fain be one
With all your odour, mystery and light,
    Oh flame of grass !
For here, to chasten my untimely gloom,
  My lady took my hand, and spoke my name ;
  The sun was on her gold hair like a flame ;
The bright wind smote her forehead like perfume ;
  The daisies darkened at her feet ; she came,
As Spring comes, scattering incense on your bloom,
    Oh flame of grass !

VII.

RESERVATION.

HER terrace looking down upon the lake
  Has corners where the deepest shadows are,
  And there we sit to watch the evening-star,
And try what melody our lutes can make;
Our reticent hearts with longing almost break,
  The while her gleaming eyes strain out afar,
  As though her soul would seek the utmost bar
Where faltering sunset quivers, flake by flake;
My forehead rests against the balustrade;
  My cheeks flush hot and cold; my eager eyes
  Are fixed on hers until the moon shall rise,—
The splendid moon of Love,—and unafraid
The utmost debt of passionate hope be paid,
  And all be given that now her heart denies.

VIII.

BY THE WELL.

Hot hands that yearn to touch her flower-like face,
With fingers spread, I set you like a weir
To stem this ice-cold stream in its career,—
And chill your pulses there a little space;
Brown hands, what right have you to claim the grace
To touch her head so infinitely dear?
Learn courteously to wait and to revere,
Lest haply ye be found in sorry case,
Hot hands that yearn!
But if ye bring her flowers at my behest,
And hold her crystal water from the well,
And bend a bough for shade when she will rest,
And if she find you fain and teachable,
That flower-like face, perchance, ah! who can tell?
In your embrace may some sweet day be pressed,
Hot hands that yearn!

IX.

MAY-DAY.

THE Past is like a funeral gone by,
The Future comes like an unwelcome guest,
And some men gaze behind them to find rest
And some urge forward with a stifled sigh ;
But soft perennial flowers break forth and die,
And sweet birds pair and twine a woodland nest ;
They, sifting all things, find the Present best,
And garnish life with that philosophy.
Like birds, like flowers, oh ! let us live To-day,
And leave To-morrow to the Fates' old fingers,
And waste no weeping over Yesterday !
Lo ! round about the golden lustre lingers,
The fresh green boughs are full of choral singers,
And all the Dryades keep holiday.

X.

MISTRUST.

THE peacock screamed and strutted in the court,
The fountain flashed its crystal to the sun,
The noisy life of noon was just begun,
And happy men forgot that life was short;
We two stood, laughing, at the turret-pane,
When some Apollo of the ranks of Mars,
Crimson with plumes and glittering like the stars,
Galloped across below, and there drew rein.
To see so confident a man-at-arms
My heart sank suddenly from sun to shade,
But she, who knows the least of Love's alarms,
Laid one soft hand upon my throbbing wrist,
And in her eyes I read the choice she made,
And anger slumbered like a tired child kissed.

XI.

EAVESDROPPING.

WHILE May was merry in the leafy trees,
I found my fair one sitting all alone,
Where round our well the long light ferns had grown
So high, so deep, that she was drowned in these,
And her bright face and yellow buoyant hair
Scarce peered above them, where she sat and read,
Flecked by the leaf-lights wavering overhead,
A great black-letter book of verses rare;
Wherein our Chaucer, years and years ago,
Wove the sad tale of Cryseyde untrue,
And Troylus yearning with a broken heart;
At last she, sighing, shut the rhythmic woe,
And let her sweet eyes dream against the blue,
And swore she would love truly, for her part.

XII.

A GARDEN-PIECE.

AMONG the flowers of summer-time she stood,
And underneath the films and blossoms shone
Her face, like some pomegranate strangely grown
To ripe magnificence in solitude;
The wanton winds, deft whisperers, had strewed
Her shoulders with her shining hair outblown,
And dyed her breast with many a changing tone
Of silvery green, and all the hues that brood
Among the flowers;
She raised her arm up for her dove to know
That he might preen him on her lovely head;
Then I, unseen, and rising on tip-toe,
Bowed over the rose-barrier, and lo!
Touched not her arm, but kissed her lips instead,
Among the flowers!

XIII.

CONFIDENT LOVE.

Now all day long we wander hand in hand,
And taste of love in many wondrous ways;
And still my fingers tremble with amaze
To find they rest in her's at her command;
We sit together in the sweet corn-land,
Her light head quivering on my sun-burnt throat,
The while the gold threads of her loose hair float
Along my shoulder by the light wind fanned:
And thus for many days we lightly played
Shepherd and shepherdess with mimic crook,
And sunned and shaded in the elm-tree's nook;
Until the newness of our love decayed,
And then we rose and left the heights and strayed
Along the glen and down beside the brook.

XIV.

LOVER'S QUARREL.

BESIDE the stream and in the alder-shade,
Love sat with us one dreamy afternoon,
When nightingales and roses made up June,
And saw the red light and the amber fade
Under the canopy the willows made,
And watched the rising of the hollow moon,
And listened to the water's gentle tune,
And was as silent as she was, sweet maid,
Beside the stream;
Till with "Farewell!" he vanished from our sight,
And in the moonlight down the glade afar
His light wings glimmered like a falling star;
Then ah! she took the left path, I the right,
And now no more we sit by noon or night
Beside the stream!

XV.

RECONCILIATION.

BUT wandering on the moors at dawn of day,
When all the sky was flushed with rosy hue,
I saw her white robe dabbled in the dew,
Among the sparkling heather where she lay;
Sobbing, she turned from me, and murmured "Nay!"
Then rising from the ground, she strove anew
To turn away, but could not stir, and flew
At last into my arms the old sweet way;
And Love, that watched us ever from afar,
Came fluttering to our side, and cried "O ye,
Who think to fly, ye cannot fly from me;
Lo! I am with you always where you are!"
Yet henceforth are we twain and are not three,
Though Love is on our foreheads like a star.

XVI.

THE FEAR OF DEATH.

BENEATH her window in the cool, calm night,
I stood and made as though I would have sung,
Being full of life and confident and young,
And dreaming only of my love's delight;
Then suddenly I saw the gloom divide,
And gliding from the darkest cypress-tree
Death came, white-boned, and snatcht my lute from me,
And sat himself, grimacing, by my side.
Just then, as when the golden moon looks down
On starless waters from a stony sky,
My love's fair face shone out above on high;
Whereat I, fearing nothing of Death's frown,
Turned smiling to salute her lovely head,
And when I turned again, lo! Death had fled!

XVII.

EXPERIENCE.

DEEP in the woods we walked at break of day,
And just beyond a whispering avenue,
Where all the flowers were nodding, full of dew,
We heard a sound of speaking far away;
And turning saw a pale calm queen assay
To tell that Love was cruel and untrue,
To knots of girls in white robes and in blue,
Who round her feet, while listening, lounged and lay,
Deep in the woods.
But we two crushed the moss with silent feet,
And passed aside unseen; for what to us,
Who knew Love's breath, and fanned its passionate heat,
And laughed to hear our hearts' twin pulses beat,
Were tuneless songs of maidens murmuring thus,
Deep in the Woods?

XVIII.

THE EXCHANGE.

LAST night, while I was sitting by her side,
And listening to her bodice' silken stir,
And stroking her soft sleeves of yellow fur,
I gave the sweet who is to be my bride
A little silver vinaigrette, star-eyed,
And chased with cupids; and received from her
The gold-embossed pomander-box of myrrh
She pounced her white hands with at eventide.
My sleep till dawn was all consumed with thirst,
And passionate longing; then the great sun's light
Burst through my flimsy dreams, and nothing tells
Of all the joy that gladdened me last night,
Except this little golden box that smells
As her sweet hands did when I kissed them first.

XIX.

UNDER THE APPLE-TREE.

AGAINST her breast I set my head, and lay
Beneath the summer fruitage of a tree,
Whose boughs last spring had borne for her and me
The fleeting blossom of a doubtful day;
That rose and white had tasted swift decay,
And now the swelling fruits of certainty
Hung there like pale green lamps, and fair to see,
And I was strong to dream the hours away
Against her breast:
Her satins rustled underneath my head,
Stirred by the motions of her perfect heart,
But she was silent, till at last she said,—
While all her countenance flushed rosy-red,—
"Dear love! oh! stay forever where thou art,
Against my breast!"

XX.

EPITHALAMIUM.

HIGH in the organ-loft, with lilied hair,
  Love plied the pedals with his snowy foot,
  Pouring forth music like the scent of fruit,
And stirring all the incense-laden air;
We knelt before the altar's gold rail, where
  The priest stood robed, with chalice and palm-shoot,
  With music-men, who bore citole and lute,
Behind us, and the attendant virgins fair;
And so our red aurora flashed to gold,
  Our dawn to sudden sun, and all the while
The high-voiced children trebled clear and cold,
  The censer-boys went singing down the aisle,
And far above, with fingers strong and sure,
Love closed our lives' triumphant overture.

THE MÆNAD'S GRAVE.

THE girl who once, on Lydian heights,
  Around the sacred groves of pines,
Would dance through whole tempestuous nights
  When no moon shines,
Whose pipe of lotus featly blown
Gave airs as shrill as Çotys' own,

Who, crowned with buds of ivy dark,
  Three times drained deep with amorous lips
The wine-fed bowl of willow-bark,
  With silver tips,
Nor sank, nor ceased, but shouted still
Like some wild wind from hill to hill,

She lies at last where poplars wave
  Their sad gray foliage all day long,

The river murmurs near her grave
A soothing song;
Farewell, it saith! Her days have done
With shouting at the set of sun.

A YEAR.

WHEN the hot wasp hung in the grape last year,
And tendrils withered and leaves grew sere,
There was little to hope and nothing to fear,
  And the smouldering autumn sank apace,
And my heart was hollow and cold and drear.

When the last gray moth that November brings
Had folded its sallow and sombre wings,
Like the tuneless voice of a child that sings,
  A music arose in that desolate place,
A broken music of hopeless things.

But time went by with the month of snows,
And the pulse and tide of that music rose;
As a pain that fades is a pleasure that grows,
  So hope sprang up with a heart of grace,
And love as a crocus-bud that blows.

And now I know when next autumn has dried
The sweet hot juice to the grape-skin's side,
And the new wasps dart where the old ones died,
My heart will have rest in one luminous face,
And its longing and yearning be satisfied.

THE ALMOND TREE.

PURE soul, who in God's high-walled Paradise
Dost walk in all the whiteness of new birth,
And hear'st the angels' shrill antiphonies,
Which are to heaven what time is to the earth,
Give ear to one to whom in days of old
Thou gavest tears for sorrow, smiles for mirth,
And all the passion one poor heart could hold!

Behold, O Love! to-day how hushed and still
My heart is, and my lips and hands are calm;
When last I strove to win you to my will,
The angels drowned my pleading in a psalm;
But now, sweet heart, there is no fear of this,
For I am quiet; therefore let the balm
Of thy light breath be on me in a kiss!

Alas! I dream again! All this is o'er!
. . . See, I look down into our garden-close,
From your old casement-sill where once you wore
The ivy for a garland on your brows;
There is no amaranth, no pomegranate here,
But can your heart forget the Christmas-rose,
The crocuses and snow-drops once so dear?

But these, like our old love, are all gone by,
And now the violets round the apple-roots
Glimmer, and jonquils in the deep grass lie,
And fruit-trees thicken into pale green shoots;
Thy garth, that put on mourning for thy death,
Is comforted, and to the sound of lutes
Dances with spring, a minstrel of bright breath.

But I am not yet comforted, O Love!
Does not the aureole blind thy gentle eyes?
That crimson robe of thine the virgins wove
Trammels thy footsteps with its draperies,
Else thou would'st see, would'st come to me, if even

The Cherubim withstood with trumpet-cries,
And barred with steel the jewelled gates of heaven!

In vain, in vain! Lo! on this first spring-morn,
For all my words, my heart is nearer rest,
And though my life, through loss of thee, is worn
To saddest memory by a brief dream blest,
I would not mar one moment of thy bliss
To clasp again thy bright and heaving breast,
Or fade into the fragrance of thy kiss.

Yet would an hour on earth with me be pain?
A greater boon than this of old was won
By her, who through the fair Sicilian plain
Sought her lost daughter, the delicious one,
With tears and rending of the flowery hair,
And sang so deftly underneath the sun,
That Hell was well-nigh vanquished by her prayer.

Hail, golden ray of God's most blessed light!
Hail, sunbeam, breaking from the faint March sky!

What rosy vision melts upon my sight?
What glory opens where the flashes die?
Surely she comes to me on earth, and stands
Among the flowerless lingering trees that sigh
Around her, and she stretches forth her hands.

Her hands she stretches forth, but speaketh not,
And all the bloom and effluence round her rise
That crown her heavenly saintship with no spot,
Herself the fairest flower in Paradise;
Draw near and speak to me, O Love, in grace,
And let me drink the beauty of thine eyes.
And learn of God by gazing in thy face.

Tempt not my passion with such lingering feet,
My trembling throat and strained white lips are numb;
Through black twined boughs I see thy body, sweet!
Robed in rose-white, thou standest calm and dumb!
Oh heart of my desire, no more delay,

Yet nearer in thy cloudy glory come,
Yet nearer, or in glory fade away!

Fade then, sweet vision! fail, Oh perfect dream!
There is no need of words of human speech,
And the blind ecstasy of thought I deem
A loftier joy than mortal sense can reach;
No more, ye flowers of Spring, shall my dull song
Be heavy in your ears, but, each to each,
My love and I hold converse and be strong.

The mystic splendour pines away, and leaves
Its fainter shadow in the almond-tree,
Whose cloud of bloom-white blossom earliest cleaves
The waste wan void of earth's sterility;
Before the troop of lyric Dryades,
Veiled, blushing as a bride, it comes, and see!
Spring leaps to kiss it, glowing in the breeze.

While life shall bring with each revolving year
Its winter-woes and icy mystery,

This fair remembrance of the sun shall bring
  My thoughts of Love re-risen in memory ;
    Old hopes shall blossom with the west wind's breath,
  And for Her sake the almond-bloom shall be
    The white fringe on the velvet pall of death.

ON DARTMOOR.

TO J. A. B.

I.

WARM tissue of refulgent vapour fills
  The valley southward to the hurrying stream,
  Whose withered and sun-wasted waters gleam
Meandering downwards through the terraced hills;
Here, even here, the hand of man fulfils
  Its daily toil, for though alone I seem
  I hear the clangour of a far-off team,
And men that shout above the shouting rills;
Nor jars this noise of labour on mine ear,
Nor seem, because of these, the spirits less near
  That animate the mountains and the skies;
The self-same heart of nature shineth clear
Through filmy garments of a golden sphere
  And earnest looks of humble human eyes.

II.

A soft gray line of haze subdues the west
That was so rosy half-an-hour ago;
The moaning night-breeze just begins to blow,
And now the team that ploughed the mountain's breast
Cease their long toil, and dream of home and rest;
Now, giant-like, the tall young ploughmen go
Between me and the sunset, footing slow;
My spirit, as an uninvited guest,
Goes with them, wondering what desire, what aim,
May stir their hearts and mine with common flame,
Or, thoughtless, do their hands suffice their soul?
I know not, care not, for I deem no shame
To hold men, flowers, and trees and stars the same,
Myself, as these, one atom in the whole.

THE TOMB OF SOPHOCLES.

A BOUNDING satyr, golden in the beard,
That leaps with goat-feet high into the air,
And crushes from the thyme an odour rare,
Keeps watch around the marble tomb revered
Of Sophocles, the poet loved and feared,
Whose mighty voice once called out of her lair
The Dorian muse severe, with braided hair,
Who loved the thyrsus and wild dances weird.
Here all day long the pious bees can pour
Libations of their honey; round this tomb
The Dionysiac ivy loves to roam:
The satyr laughs; but He awakes no more,
Wrapped up in silence at the grave's cold core,
Nor sees the sun wheel round in the white dome.

FEBRUARY IN ROME.

WHEN Roman fields are red with cyclamen,
And in the palace-gardens you may find,
Under great leaves and sheltering briony-bind,
Clusters of cream-white violets, O then
The ruined city of immortal men
Must smile, a little to her fate resigned;
And through her corridors the slow warm wind
Gush harmonies beyond a mortal ken.
Such soft Favonian airs upon a flute,
Such shadowy censers burning live perfume,
Shall lead the mystic city to her tomb;
Nor flowerless springs, nor autumns without fruit,
Nor summer-mornings when the winds are mute,
Trouble her soul till Rome be no more Rome.

GREECE AND ENGLAND.

WOULD this sunshine be completer,
Or these violets smell sweeter,
Or the birds sing more in metre,
  If it all were years ago,
  When the melted mountain-snow
  Heard in Enna all the woe
Of the poor forlorn Demeter?

Would a stronger life pulse o'er us
If a panther-chariot bore us,
If we saw, enthroned before us,
  Ride the leopard-footed god,
  With a fir-cone tip the rod,
  Whirl the thyrsus round, and nod
To a drunken Mænad-chorus?

Bloomed there richer, redder roses
Where the Lesbian earth encloses
All of Sappho? where reposes
  Meleager, laid to sleep
  By the olive-girdled deep?
  Where the Syrian maidens weep,
Bringing serpolet in posies?

Ah! it may be! Greece had leisure
For a world of faded pleasure;
We must tread a tamer measure,
  To a milder, homelier lyre;
  We must tend a paler fire,
  Lay less perfume on the pyre,
Be content with poorer treasure!

Were the brown-limbed lovers bolder?
Venus younger, Cupid older?
Down the wood-nymph's warm white shoulder
  Trailed a purpler, madder vine?
  Were the poets more divine?

Brew we no such golden wine
Here, where summer suns are colder?

Yet for us too life has flowers,
Time a glass of joyous hours,
Interchange of sun and showers,
And a wealth of leafy glades,
Meant for loving men and maids,
Full of warm green lights and shades,
Trellis-work of wild-wood bowers.

So while English suns are keeping
Count of sowing-time and reaping,
We've no need to waste our weeping,
Though the glad Greeks lounged at ease
Underneath their olive-trees,
And the Sophoclean bees
Swarmed on lips of poets sleeping!

THE BURDEN OF DELIGHT.

Remember how the winter through,
  While all the ways were choked with mire,
Half-maddened with the rain, we two
  Have nestled closer round the fire ;
And talked of all that should be done
When April brought us back the sun,
What gardens white with butterflies,
  What soft green nooks of budded heather,
What moorlands open to the skies
    We two would scour together !

And now the month comes round again !
  Cool interchange of genial hours,
Soft gleams of sunlight, streams of rain,
  Have starred the meadow-lands with flowers,
And in the orchards on the hills

The grass is gold with daffodils,
And we have wandered hand in hand,
Where sea below and sky above
Seem narrowing to a strip of land
The pathway that we love.

Our path looks out on the wide sea,
And knows not of the land ; we sit
For hours in silent reverie,
To watch the sea and pulse with it ;
Its deep monotonous refrain
Brings melancholy, almost pain ;
We scarcely wish to speak or move,
But just to feel each other there,
And sense of presence is like love,
And silence more than prayer.

Sharp round the steep hill's utmost line
It winds, and, just below, the grass
Sinks with tumultuous incline
To where the rock-pools shine like glass ;

The tufts of thrift can drink their fill
Of sea-wind on this rugged hill,
And all the herbage, tossed and blown,
  Is stained with salt and crushed with wind,
Save where, behind some boulder stone,
    A harbour flowers may find.

The bright sea sparkles, sunbeam-kissed,
  And o'er its face such breezes float
As lightly turn to amethyst
  The pearl-gray of a ring-dove's throat;
Thus stirred and ruffled, shines anew
The radiant plain of changing hue,
So gentle that the eye divines
  No reason why the foam should fall
So loudly, in such serried lines,
    Against the dark rock-wall.

The wind is low now; even here
  Where all the breezes congregate,
The softest warbler need not fear

To linger with its downy mate ;
And here where you have longed to be,
So many weeks and months, with me,
Sit silently or softly speak
Or sing some air of pensive mood,
Not loud enough to mar or break
This delicate solitude.

Are we not happy ? Sunlit air,
Soft colour, floods of dewy light,
A flowery perfume everywhere,
Pour out their wealth for our delight ;
Through dreary hours of snow and sleet,
The hope of these winged winter's feet ;
We have them now ; the very breath
Of nature seems an altar-fire
That wakes the bright world's heart from death
To satiate our desire.

Sing to me, therefore, sing or speak !
Wake my dull heart to happiness !

Perchance my pulses are too weak
To stir with all this sweet excess;
Perhaps the sudden spring has come
Too soon, and found my spirit dumb;
Howe'er it be, my heart is cold,
No echo stirs within my brain,
To me, too suddenly grown old,
This beauty speaks in vain.

Why are you silent? Lo! to-day
It is not as it once hath been;
I can not sit the old sweet way,
Absorbed, contented and serene;
I cannot feel my heart rejoice,
I crave the comfort of your voice;
Speak! speak, remind me of the past,
Let my spent embers at your fire
Revive and kindle, till at last
Delight surpass desire.

Still are you silent, only press
My hand, and turn your face away?

You wince, too, from the fierce caress
That April flings on us to-day?
O human heart, too weak to bear
The whole fulfilment of a prayer!
This sudden summer strikes us dumb,
The wild hope realized but scares,
The substances of dreams become
A burden unawares.

How can we sit here and not thrill
With but the pleasure of past time?
This pathway winding round the hill
Should stir us like enchanted rhyme!
Nay! for the dull and sluggish brain
Is spurred to action all in vain!
And when the spirit cannot rise
Through natural feeling into light,
No perfumed air, no splendid skies
Can lend it wings for flight.

Come then and leave the glittering sea
To sparkle in the laughing air,

Another day its face will be
No less refulgent, no less fair,
And we by custom be made strong
To bear what we desired so long;
To-day the slackening nerves demand
A milder light, a sadder air,
Some corner of forgotten land
Still winter-like and bare.

Come, leave our foot-path for to-day,
And, turning inland, seek the woods,
Where last year's sombre leaves decay
In brown sonorous solitudes;
The murmurous voice of those dark trees
Shall teach us more than sun or seas,
And in that twilight we may find
Some golden flower of strange perfume,
A blossom hidden from the wind,
A flame within the tomb.

THE MANDRAKES.

A Study in Grotesque.

"*Prorex.* And whither must these flies be sent.
Oberon. To everlasting banishment.
The woods are yew trees, bent and broke
By whirlwinds; here and there an oak
Half cleft with thunder. To this grove
We banish them.
Culprits. Some mercy, Jove!
Oberon. You should have cried so in your youth,
When Chronos and his daughter Truth
Sojourned among you: when you spent
Whole years in riotous merriment."
DAY'S "*Parliament of Bees*," 1607.

WHETHER in meditation or in dream,
Or whether in the circle of known lands
I walked, I cannot tell; the crested stream
Of the great waters breaking on the sands,
The far brown moors, the gulls in white-winged bands,

Seem too clear-coloured on my memory
To be the ghosts of any phantasy.

Along the sweep of an untrodden bay,
  Towards a great headland that before me rose,
Full merrily I held my sunny way;
  And in that atmosphere of gold, and snows,
  And pure blue fire of air and sea, the woes
Of mortals and their pitiful despair
Seemed vague to my glad spirit void of care.

The long bluff rose against the sea, and thrust
  Its storm-proof bosom far into the deep,
And many a breaker, many a roaring gust
  Disturbed the calm of its primeval sleep,
  Through the gray winter twilight; there did creep
In swarthy trefoil, or salt-blighted grass,
A token where the uncurb'd sea-wind did pass.

So even in the bright and pure June air
  The place seemed vestured in unholy guise;

The loneliness was like a pain to bear,
I sought about, with strangely troubled eyes,
For bird or flower to glad me in some-wise,
In vain ; then at the utmost verge I stayed
Where far beneath the refluent thunders swayed.

Then as I stood upon the precipice,
Drinking the sunlight and sharp air like wine,
I heard, or thought I heard, a murmur twice,—
First, like a far-off shrieking, clear and fine,
Then like an anxious shouting for a sign
To careless boatman steering o'er the rim
Of rocks,—but both behind me and both dim.

But even while, not turning, in my mind
I thought how very lonely the place was,—
The rushing of the steadfast wings of wind
Being empty of all common sounds that pass,
The song of birds, or sighing in the grass,—
Then suddenly a howl to rend the skies
From the bare land behind me seemed to rise.

And while my skin was wrinkled with affright,
I noticed far and far away, an isle,
With faintest waves of jagged pale blue light
Skirt the horizon, land not seen erewhile;—
This in a flash of thought; such sights beguile
Our hearts in wildest moments, and we know
Not clearly after how it could be so.

But in a second, ere the long shriek died,
I turned to see whence came this note of woe,
And marked on the down's topmost hollow wide
One lonely scrawling gnarled tree that did grow,
Coiling its leafless branches stunt and low,
Midmost the promontory; thither I
Drawn by some hate-spell felt my way did lie.

It was a shameful tree, the twisted pain
Of its sad boughs and sterile hollow stem
Took fearful forms of things that are man's bane;
And circling drops of oozings did begem
Its twigs with a dull poisonous anadem;

It had no bright young leaves to tell of Spring,
Nor clustering moss that hallowed eld doth bring.

And at its foot were forms that had no shape,
Unmoving creatures twisted like the tree,
With horrid wooden faces set agape
And bodies buried in the earth; to see
Such human features moulded terribly
Sent all the life-blood surging to my heart,
And mine own breath was ready to depart;

When one most awful visage bent the roots
That were its jaws, and moaning, slowly spake;
"O mortal, what assemblage of soft lutes
Rings now across the silvery waves that break
Along the city, where the shadows make
In tremulous calm lines of sunset fire
A magic image of each dome and spire?"

He questioned thus in strained voluptuous tones;
His hideous feet deep in the ground were set;

His body fashioned without skin or bones
Was like the mystic figure of smooth jet
Egyptian priests wore in an amulet,
What time they mourned Osiris; like a shriek
His pained voice ended sharply, forced and weak.

Then when I answered nothing, once again
He spoke —"In what elysium of the blest,
Lapped in sweet airs, forgetful of all pain,
Fulfilling an eternity of rest,
Lies Titian, of all painters loved the best?
Oh! say, in any land where you have been,
Heard you of him and not of Aretine?"

"O matchless painter of the noble heart!
Dear friend I loved long centuries ago!
Lean from that golden chamber where thou art,
Above the sun and moon, and lighten so
The utter, endless agony of woe
That fills my wretched being, doomed for aye
Rooted in this foul living grave to stay.

"Ah, mortal, listen! I was once a child
Into whose brain God poured the mystic wine,
Full of pure odours, fragrance undefiled,—
Keen drink to make a poet all divine.
I took the gift; men called me Aretine:
All that was pure and poet-like I spurned,
And to hell-fire for inspiration turned.

"God suffered long with me, and let the fire
Of passionate youth burn to the ash of age,
Saying to the angels, 'Surely when desire
Is dead within him, his true heritage
Will seem more precious to him, and the page
Of the great book shall in the end record
Some prayer, some love, some tender-spoken word.'

"Yet I, still impious, burned before my God
The rancid oil of hypocritic prayer,
And with unsanctified, rash footsteps trod
Those shadowy precincts, where the misty air
Is heavy with the sound of hymns, and rare

High spirit-breathings fill the solemn place
Where God meets man, in silence, face to face."

I stood beneath the tree now ; all the ground
  Was full of these grim shadows of mankind,
And all in some way shamefully were bound
  Into the earth, but no two could I find
  In which the same quaint shapes were intertwined :
But each was human, yet each had the feature
Of some mis-shapen thing or hideous creature.

Oh, how the calm around us, and the light
  Of pure cerulean æther, full of sun,
Made awful contrast with the shameful blight
  Of these foul natures ! Him I looked upon
  Was like an old man, utterly undone,
With white thin locks, that blew about his eyes,
Like grasses round a stump when summer dies.

Fear held my tongue ; I trembled like the leaves
  That quiver when the gradual autumn falls

On shadowy Vallombrosa, and bereaves
The forest, full of flowery funerals, —
And all the windy places have their palls
Of yellow leafage, till the noiseless snow
Muffles the rustling of this gusty woe.

At last I murmured, "Cannot rest or death
Forever visit this pale place of tombs?"
And ceased; for, like the sound of a sharp breath
That from the drawn throat of one dying comes,
Whose heart the Master of all breath benumbs,
An answering voice arose, whose calm, intense,
Sad music won my ear with sharp suspense:

"Not vervain, gathered when the dog-star rose,
Not agrimony, euphrasy, or rue,
Not any herb can bring our pain repose,
Nor any poison make our summers few;
For ever our own agonies renew
Our wasted bodies still to suffer pain,
To suffer, pine, renew, and pine again.

"Ah, turn away! behold me not! those eyes
Burn me like lightning with a searing shame;
Gaze not upon these ghastly infamies,
That must deform me worse than maimed or lame,
The ribald children scoff at for their game;
Ah! in what jocund wise I danced and sung
Through the warm Tuscan nights, when life was young.

"These gray and shrunken fingers once were lithe,
And meet for all most dainty handiwork;
Whether a painted coffer for a blithe
Fair bride, or for the Caliph or Grand Turk
A golden chalice, where red wine might lurk
Coiled unforbidden; or for monks' dim eyes,—
Worked in distemper,—hell and paradise.

"Ay me! what lovely fancies I have wrought
In cloisters, or along a church's wall,
Where in a high-fenced garden angels taught
Our Lady at her baby's feet to fall;
There, with his keys, went Peter; there stood Paul

With long brown beard, and leant upon his sword;
And all the virgins, singing, praised the Lord.

"But, best of all, I loved to stand and paint
His face who doubted when the Lord arose,—
Andrew, my ever-blessed patron saint,
Bearing his mighty cross, and worn with woes,
And pining sore from self-inflicted blows,—
His passionate, jealous, loving, hating heart
Seemed every-way my very counterpart.

"He is in glory now, and walks and sings
With saints who take his rough brown hand in theirs,
And sees the angels' silver-spotted wings!
But I convulse the noon-day with my prayers,
And in the night-time blast the icy airs
With my shrill pains; hearken for what offence
My soul was doomed to anguish so intense!

"If one man's art can be another's bane,—
If half the swiftest runners miss the goal,—

If thinkers weave out holy thoughts in vain,
  Which bless the world and ruin their own soul,—
  If bitterness and languor be our dole,—
Why do we seek, so greedily, at all
Laurel, to poison our own brows withal?

"All this is only vanity; but, lo!
  For weary years I slowly fought my way
High up the hill of fame, and should I go
  Right sadly down again at fall of day,
  Because this Domenic, this popinjay,
Could trick a wall out with a newer brush,
And after him all men began to rush?

"When I grew poor, and no man came to me,
  One night I lay awake, and by my bed
Heard a low, subtle voice, and seemed to see
  A little demon, with a fiery head,
  That whispered, 'If now Domenic were dead,
And his new way dead with him, ha! ha! ha!
Luck would come back again to Andrea!'

"So one bright night when singing he went by
I watched him; round his neck a chain of gold
Glittered and lured me like a serpent's eye;
It was the price of some new picture sold:
My nerves grew steel, my veins of fire throbbed cold,
My dagger smote him through the neck, charm-bound,
And like a snake, the chain slid to the ground.

"Ay me! ay me! what cruel, cruel, pang
Draws forth this tale of mine own infamy;
Ah youth! by all the angel choirs that sang,
Round holy Christ at his nativity,
I pray thee mock me not, in charity,
Who for one hour of passion and fell spite
Must suffer endless torture infinite."

Then at my side a voice cried, "Look on me!
Stamp on me, crush me, grind me with your heel!
I, even I, this shapeless thing am he
That slandered Sappho! Set on me the seal
Of your undying hatred, let me feel,

Even though I burn with anguish, that men know
Her holy life was ever pure as snow."

Then flattened out, I saw upon the ground
  What seemed the hide of some mis-shapen beast,
With a pinned cord to bind it twisted round;
  But lo! its heart in beating never ceased,
  And now the flutter of its breath increased,
Barring its body of unhealthy hue
With lurid waves of mingling green and blue.

"Of old," a stifled voice proclaimed, "I dwelt
  Deep in the cedar-shades of that high hill,
Whose brow looks down on Lesbos, and the belt
  Of sun-lit sea, where rippling laughters fill
  The spaces down to Chios; thither still,
As gold above the Lydian mountains shone,
Sappho would climb to dream and muse alone.

"How oft her wind-swept hair and kindling eyes
  I watched, unseen within my own rose-bowers,

Her cheek that glowed at her heart's phantasies,
Bright as the refluent flush of fields of flowers
Stirred by the light feet of the flying hours,
When, about sunrise, on a morn of May,
Westward they troop, and herald the young day!

"So fair was she in my conceit; but soon
Her songs were sung from Lesbian town to town,
And other islands claimed the lyric boon,
And Andros praised, and Paros sent a crown,
And reverend men, in philosophic gown,
From Greece, from sage Ionia, came to lay
At Sappho's feet the homage of a day.

"Then in my heart the love I bore her grew
To foulest envy, like the bitter core
That lies in the sweet berry of the yew;
For I, too, fashioned for the lute, and bore
Such ivy-wreaths as would-be poets wore;
But never ode of mine did men repeat,
Singing for glee along the broad white street.

"It happed that through the islands I must go
To gather tribute, and where'er I came
The youths and girls would gather round to know
What news of Sappho, till my heart became
Shrivelled and parched with spite as with a flame,
And evermore I set my subtle tongue
To hint and whisper nameless tales of wrong.

"And soon all lands rang out with that ill-fame,
For little souls delight to think the worst
Of sovereign spirits who have won great name
For virtue or for wit, so all men nursed
And spread the rumour of these tales accursed,
Which smouldered, far from Lesbos, till she died,
Then burst in lurid flames unsanctified.

"So to this limbo my unholy spirit
Was dragged by demons when my pulses sank,
And here forever shall my flesh inherit
More pain than ever human body drank;
See this bruised head, this haggard arm and shank,

The slow contracting pain of centuries
Has drawn the bones into this hideous guise."

Then silence came, save far away the sound
Of waves that rang like timbrels in the air,
Dashing and dying on the shore, steel-bound;
I stood above those lurid shapes in prayer,
Desiring that, if any hope there were,
Quickly their souls and bodies might decay,
And to the sovereign waters fade away.

For to my thought the moaning, sighing sea
Seemed yearning to receive them to its breast,
And fain would let its huge embraces be
Their haven of forgetfulness and rest:—
"O let them die!" I murmured; "It is best!
Have they not fed on anguish all their years?
And drenched the morsel in the wine of tears?

"Their pains are greater than the Titan's were,
Hung, a god-man, a sign to man and God,

For his immortal spirit was aware
Of its own immortality, and trod
With head erect beneath the oppressor's rod;
But these are bitten through with their own shame,
And scorcht with infamy as with a flame.

"Wherefore, if Heaven forbid not, let them die!"
The echo of my accents broke in moans
From all the grim and stark fraternity,
That lay in heaps about my feet like stones;
Down to the caverns of my heart their groans
Sank, as a meteor, breeding death and woe,
Slants down the skies on weeping lands below.

Then all the silence grew a mighty sound,
Gathering in voice along the nether sea,
As when, in some Norwegian gulf profound,
Sailors, becalmed along the monstrous lee
Of desolate Torghatten, hear the glee
Of many a riotous and rebel wind,
Deep in the mountain's riven heart confined.

With murmuring of immortal wings it came,
  Blown by no wind, and moaned along the deep;
Then hung at last above that place of shame
  On plumes of sound, like some great bird asleep,—
  Though o'er the blue no cloud nor stain did creep,—
And slowly gave in words articulate
All the vast utterance of the unseen fate.

O thou grave mystic, who, by inner light,
  Didst watch the ruddy, throbbing life in flowers,
And shaken by no pitiful affright,
  Held'st converse with the eternal starry powers;
  By all the bliss in full ecstatic hours,
From spirit-tongues, to thee, a spirit, given,
Bow down and aid me from thy lucent heaven!

Blake, loveliest of the sons of shadowy light,
  Throned, with dawn-mist for purple, sun for gold,—
Regent above us in all true men's sight,
  Among thy kindred angel-ranks enrolled,—
  Think not thy latest lover overbold,

If in sore need he for a while prolong
Prayer for thy aid in his most arduous song!

For he must murmur what a spirit sang,
  Lisp the weird words no mortal can pronounce;
For all about my head the air now rang
  With the dread clarion Voice, that did denounce
  The writhing things, and bade my heart renounce
Pity and grief, and drown in obloquy
All hope for these, still dying and to die.

"No temple, and no tripod, and no shrine
  Is half so sacred as the soul of man,
Lit with a flame more subtle, more divine,
  Than that which round the glimmering altar ran,
  With mutterings and with thunders, when the clan
Of Baal-prophets howled, and sank down dead
On the cold parapet their life-blood fed.

"Man is himself the lamp for hallowed use,
  The oil that feeds it and the hand that lights,

Each to his brother is the plenteous cruse,
And in the universal gift unites;
So all combine, with sacrificial rites,
Throughout the gleaming world, from bound to bound,
To spread the wealth that old Prometheus found.

"And so should all things slowly climb up higher
Into the perfectness of utter rest,
And no least breath of passion stir the fire
That fell from God and burneth in man's breast;
By his own purity should man be blest,
The soul being priest, and worshipper, and shrine,
Bearing God's presence for an outward sign.

"But ah! what punishment would not be meet
To scourge that ribald priest, that should defile
The lintel of his own God's mercy-seat;
Or who, with nimble fingers and smooth wile,
Should from the prostrate worshippers beguile
The sacred gifts of balsam or of myrrh,
To burn in sport where harlot-loves confer?

"Would the vexed God be pitiful and meek,
Nor smite the impious with a thunder-bolt,
Clothing the lingering life and hollow cheek
With pain as with a garment? Let the dolt
Go whine and whimper over heath and holt,—
Shall any lovers of the God be found
Whose hearts shall melt with pity at the sound?

"Wherefore, if all things sacred, all things pure,
All that makes life worth living for to men,
White chastity, and faith, and honour sure
Have in your heart their answering echoes, then
Cease to be wise above a mortal ken,
And judge that we, whose robes are virtues, know
Where justice rules, and mercy may not go."

As from the heart's-core of a trumpet-blast
May rise the melody of whispering flutes,
A softer music on my ear was cast,
Even as I lay among those living roots,
And heard their direful sentence, and the fruits

Of their insane rebellion; sweet and far,
As orchard-singing under a pale star,

That tender fluting rose, but, gathering strength,
  Thrilled like a hundred instruments in tune,
Here soft citoles, and here in liquid length
  The sobbing of tense harp-strings, and all soon
  Rounded with murmurs of the full bassoon,
And all words faded, and I rose, and lo!
A lady standing on the hill of woe.

Adown her shoulders, over the broad breast,
  A saffron robe fell lightly to her feet,
Edged quaintly with meander; for the rest,
  Her changeful eyes were wonderfully sweet,
  Sea-coloured, and her braided hair made meet
Under a fillet of starred myrtle-flowers,
More large and pure than any bloom of ours.

Her face was even as apple-blossom is,
  When first the winds awaken it; her mouth

Seemed like the incarnation of a kiss ;
A philtre for all sorrow ; in heart-drouth
A fountain breathing of the fragrant south ;
A cage for songs ;—a violin—who knows ?
Perchance the rose-tree of the world's great rose !

Kalliope, the eternal Muse, she hight,
Whose lips woke music in Mæonides,
Through all the alternatives of day and night,
Silence and song, that this poor wan world sees,
She walks unchanged, while old divinities
Wither and die, and new creeds spring and fall,
And new flowers hear the new-born cuckoos call.

There in her loveliness she stood and spread
Her arms out to me in most smiling wise,
Saying, " Oh, my servant, in such drearihed,
Why floats thy spirit in a wind of sighs ?
What ruth and passion gather to thine eyes ?
What part hast thou with these ? Ah ! wayward child,
Should I be clement to them ? " And she smiled.

O ! what a smile ? But when she ceased, once more
I cast my eyes upon the twisted features ;
And all the pity that my heart once bore
To watch the writhing of the loathsome creatures
Fled from me, for their foul degenerate natures
Scowled under those pure eyes of hers, as hell
Must blacken, seen from heaven's white pinnacle.

She vanished. Then they howled and howled until
The cave of air, devoid of other sound,
Was full of moaning echoes round the hill ;
Then with my hands my aching ears I bound,
And rushing from that cruel cursèd ground,
From cleft to cleft leapt downwards to the sea,
Where faint wave-music was as balm to me.

EUTHANASIA.

WHEN age comes by and lays his frosty hands
  So lightly on mine eyes, that, scarce aware
  Of what an endless weight of gloom they bear,
I pause, unstirred, and wait for his commands;
When time has bound these limbs of mine with bands,
  And hushed mine ears, and silvered all my hair,
  May sorrow come not, nor a vain despair
Trouble my soul that meekly girded stands.

As silent rivers into silent lakes,
Through hush of reeds that not a murmur breaks,
  Wind, mindful of the poppies whence they came,
So may my life, and calmly burn away,
As ceases in a lamp at break of day
  The fragrant remnant of memorial flame.

THE PRAISE OF DIONYSUS.

Chant Royal.

To A. D.

BEHOLD, above the mountains there is light,
A streak of gold, a line of gathering fire,
And the dim East hath suddenly grown bright
With pale aërial flame, that drives up higher
The lurid mists that of the night aware
Breasted the dark ravines and coverts bare;
Behold, behold! the granite gates unclose,
And down the vales a lyric people flows;
Dancing to music, in their dance they fling
Their frantic robes to every wind that blows,
And deathless praises to the vine-god sing.

Nearer they press, and nearer still in sight,
Still dancing blithely in a seemly choir;

Tossing on high the symbol of their rite,
The cone-tipped thyrsus of a god's desire;
Nearer they come, tall damsels flushed and fair,
With ivy circling their abundant hair;
Onward, with even pace, in stately rows,
With eye that flashes, and with cheek that glows,
And all the while their tribute-songs they bring,
And newer glories of the past disclose,
And deathless praises to the vine-god sing.

The pure luxuriance of their limbs is white,
And flashes clearer as they draw the nigher,
Bathed in an air of infinite delight,
Smooth without wound of thorn or fleck of mire,
Borne up by song as by a trumpet's blare,
Leading the van to conquest, on they fare;
Fearless and bold, whoever comes or goes,
These shining cohorts of Bacchantes close,
Shouting and shouting till the mountains ring,
And forests grim forget their ancient woes,
And deathless praises to the vine-god sing.

And youths are there, for whom full many a night
Brought dreams of bliss, vague dreams that haunt and tire,
Who rose in their own ecstasy bedight,
And wandered forth through many a scourging briar,
And waited shivering in the icy air,
And wrapped the leopard-skin about them there,
Knowing, for all the bitter air that froze,
The time must come, that every poet knows,
When he shall rise and feel himself a king,
And follow, follow where the ivy grows,
And deathless praises to the vine-god sing.

But oh! within the heart of this great flight,
Whose ivory arms hold up the golden lyre?
What form is this of more than mortal height?
What matchless beauty, what inspirèd ire!
The brindled panthers know the prize they bear,
And harmonize their steps with stately care;
Bent to the morning, like a living rose,
The immortal splendour of his face he shows,
And where he glances, leaf and flower and wing

Tremble with rapture, stirred in their repose,
And deathless praises to the vine-god sing.

ENVOI.

PRINCE of the flute and ivy, all thy foes
Record the bounty that thy grace bestows,
But we, thy servants, to thy glory cling,
And with no frigid lips our songs compose,
And deathless praises to the vine-god sing.

THE LOSS OF THE "EURYDICE."

March, 24, 1878.

Tired with the toils that know no end,
On wintry seas long doomed to roam,
They smiled to think that March could lend
Such radiant winds to waft them home;
Long perils overpast,
They stood for port at last,
Close by the fair familiar water-way,
And on their sunlit lee
All hearts were glad to see
The crags of Culver through the shining day;
While every white-winged bird,
Whose joyous cry they heard,
Seemed wild to shout the welcome that it bore
Of love from friends on shore.

Ah! brief their joy, as days are brief
In March, that loves not joy nor sun;
O bitter to the heart of grief
The port that never shall be won!
Fair ship, with all sail set,
Didst thou perchance forget
The changing times and treacherous winds of Spring?
And could those headlands gray
Rehearse no tale to-day
Of wrecks they have seen, and many a grievous thing?
Thy towering cliff, Dunnose,
Full many a secret knows,—
Cry out in warning voice! too much they dare;
Death gathers in the air!

A wind blew sharp out of the north,
And o'er the island-ridges rose
A sound of tempest going forth,
And murmur of approaching snows;
Then through the sunlit air
Streamed dark the lifted hair

Of storm-cloud, gathering for the light's eclipse,
And fiercely rose and fell
The shriek of waves, the knell
Of seamen, and the doom of wandering ships;
As with an eagle's cry
The mighty storm rushed by,
Trailing its robe of snow across the wave,
And gulfed them like a grave.

It passed; it fell; and all was still;
But, homebound wanderers, where were they?
The wind went down behind the hill,
The sunset gilded half the bay;
Ah! loud bewildered sea,
Vain, vain our trust in thee
To bring our kinsfolk home, through storm and tide!
So sharp and swift the blow,
Thyself dost hardly know
Where now they rest whom thou didst bear and guide;
Our human hearts may break,
Cold Ocean, for thy sake,—

Thou not the less canst paint in colours fair
The eve of our despair.

Not hard for heroes is the death
That greets them from the cannon's lips,
When heaven is red with flaming breath,
And shakes with roar of sundering ships:
When through the thunder-cloud
Sounds to them, clear and loud,
The voice of England calling them by name;
And as their eyes grow dim
They hear their nation's hymn,
And know the prelude of immortal fame;
But sad indeed is this,
The meed of war to miss,
To die for England, yet in dying know
They leave no name but woe.

They cannot rest through coming years,
In any ground that England owns,
And billows salter than our tears
Wash over their unhonoured bones;

Yet in our hearts they rest
Not less revered and blest
Than those, their brothers, who in fighting fell;
Nor shall our children hear
Their name pronounced less dear,
When England's roll of gallant dead we tell;
For ever shall our ships,
There, at the Solent's lips,
Pass out to glory over their still bed,
And praise the silent dead.

SERENADE.

THE lemon-petals gently fall
Within the windless Indian night,
The wild liana'd waterfall
Hangs, lingering like a ghostly light;
Drop down to me, and linger long, my heart's entire delight.

Among the trees, the fiery flies
Move slowly in their robes of flame;
Above them, through the liquid skies,
The stars in squadrons do the same;
Move through the garden down to me, and softly speak my name!

By midnight's moving heart that shakes
The coloured air and kindling gloom,

By all the forms that beauty takes
In fruit, in blossom, in perfume,
Come down and still the aching doubts that haunt me and consume!

Else if the chilly morning break
And thou hast heard my voice in vain,
Unmoved as is a forest-lake
That through the branches hears the rain,
Beware lest Love himself pass by to bless thee, and—refrain!

TO HENRIK IBSEN IN DRESDEN.

WITHIN the bowery window-nook,
My red azalea flowered to-day;
Its colour fell upon the book
That I was reading where I lay,—
Your own sardonic masque of Love,
Wherein, when last azaleas blew,
I read, and marked the light above
Come faintly-tinted through.

And as your gracious verse unfolds
Its fluted meanings, leaf by leaf,
And knows not half the wealth it holds,
Till, gathered in a rosy sheaf,
The full-proportioned flowers of song
Flame, finished, from the perfect tree,
And pour out perfume, pure and strong,
For all the world and me,—

So, now that May is well begun,
And cuckoos in the woodland shout,
My perfect flower that loves the sun
Will spread its faultless petals out;
Each bloom will tell my brain of you,
Norse poet with the tropic heart,
From whose blind root there slowly grew
Such flowers of perfect art!

And while I wait for your new song[1]
To waft its fragrance o'er the sea,
I hold the memories that belong
To you, to Norway and to me;
I wander where the wild swan calls,
And where the dark lake lies and shines,
And watch sonorous waterfalls
Rush, whitening, through the pines.

You in the city of sweet names,
Where Raffaelle and Correggio meet,—

[1] *Kejser og Galilæer.*

I by the dismal-tided Thames,
In dreary square and sultry street,—
Both, by one magnet drawn, extend
Our thoughts across the northern deep,
Till both our beings mix and blend
Where jarls and vikings sleep.

So flies a bridge across the sea
From you to Norway, clear like glass
A mistier framework, built for me,
Permits my vaguer hopes to pass;
One link remains unforged, one base
The wizard's weird triangle needs,
One ray to join us face to face,
And then our art succeeds.

That link between your land and mine,
My English and your Norse denies;
Your verses lie like gems that hide
In coffers sealed from English eyes;

Behind the veil we dimly know
A solemn figure stands complete,
But feel not how the draperies flow,
How poise the hands and feet.

For me slow hours have drawn aside
The curtain that concealed the work;
Diaphanous thin webs still hide,
And gauzy faint concealments lurk,
But all the gracious form displayed
Delights me with its sweeping lines,
And every day some progress made
Decreases what confines.

But oh! to win my people's eyes
To stand with me—to gaze, admire,
To praise the statue's form and size,—
That is the goal of my desire;
But, friend, you dream not of the weight
Of insular phlegmatic pride,

The sturdy self-sufficient hate
Of all the world beside.

My England, where the grass is deep,
And burns with buttercups in May,
Whose brookside violets nod in sleep,
Washed purer purple by the spray;
My England of the August corn,—
The heavy-headed waving gold,—
Sweet blossoming land from bourne to bourne,
Whose name and speech I hold,

Receives my homage; none the less
I deem some precious things may be,
With which the sovereign Muses bless
The world outside our circling sea;
Some unknown gift the gods may leave
To be enshrined in alien lands,
A boon we humbly must receive
From unfamiliar hands.

For you the slow revenge of time
  Will bring the meed your works have won,
When common speech from clime to clime
  Shall link the nations into one;
The vast Republic of the arts
  Will crown your deathless fame with bays,
When our poor tongues and beating hearts
  Are dust on trodden ways.

For me what is there? Just to sit
  Beneath my red azalea-tree,
Half in the sun, and flecked with it,
  And with flower-shadows, silently;
To read the strong sonorous verse,
  And think, my poet, now and then,
How, though the times wax worse and worse,
  You walk the world of men.

Till this consoles me, for I know
  That though the nations, old and weak,

Tremble with change, and shivering so,
With gathered voices shake and shriek,
You tremble not, but brave and strong,
Pour forth as from a trumpet's mouth,
The great anathemas of song
Sent northward from the south.

Work then in patience, till you see
The confines of your Holy Land,
That Palestine of poesy,
Where Agnes waits for you, and Brand;
Pull on with strenuous arm and oar,
The sandy bar will soon be past,
And grassy odours from the shore
Proclaim you home at last!

May, 1872.

THE SISTERS.

A DORIAN IDYLL.

PHILENION. LYSIDICE.

LYSIDICE.

DEAREST, the onyx lamp is at thy side,
The vine-surrounded casement open wide,
And on the floor's mosaic I have set
Green sprigs of rue and buds of serpolet,
And still the rain upon their leaves is wet.
Farewell, farewell, and sing thyself to sleep.

PHILENION.

I fear my dreams will scarce be long or deep.

LYSIDICE.

Ah! let me close you, burning eyes and blue!
Melt to a cloud, and film yourselves in dew,
Else must I kiss you under either brow!

PHILENION.

I ought to soothe myself to slumber now
Were kisses poppies or oblivion love!

LYSIDICE.

Yea, soon behind our dear pomegranate-grove
The large slow-footed moon will glide and set,
And all the world its weariness forget.

PHILENION.

Bow down once more that little curly head;
And lay those soft arms on the saffron bed;
Among the trees, and where the shade is deep,
Who comes to-night when all the world's asleep?

LYSIDICE.

Oh, hush ! he will not see me, will not know
That I can hear his footfall there below.

PHILENION.

And whilst thou listenest for his wandering feet,
May I not also keep my vigil, sweet ?

LYSIDICE.

Thou hast no reason, dear, to lie awake ;
I seek to sleep but cannot for love's sake.
Ah, who has told thee that he comes at night
I hardly told my heart my heart's delight.
He never sees, he never hears me there,
I lie, with fluttering pulse, till unaware
His presence seems to quicken all the air.
Is he not god-like, dear Philenion ?
Like Paris when the triple deity shone
Around his face and shoulders in a flame ?
Like great Adonis when the Cyprian came

And flushed him with embraces? Ah! that smile!
I fain for shame must hide my face awhile!
Ah! pity for my love's sake,—since thy breast
Has no such reason for a sick unrest.

PHILENION.

Dear child, young love thinks ever it knows best,
And I seem old to thee, and past my time,
Five years, forsooth, beyond thy budding prime.

LYSIDICE.

Last morn he came, and with his arms he led
A new-washed lamb with roses round its head;
He seemed to mean the lovely gift for me,
But blushed too much my blushing face to see—
How sweet it is to tell thee all my woe.

PHILENION.

Speak on, nor heed, love, that I tremble so.

LYSIDICE.

I stole up towards him when his flocks lay down
From stress of noontide on the pastures brown;

Before him flashed a distant streak of sea,
Behind him rose a whispering tamarisk-tree.
I listened close, and, sister, ere he set
The laughing calathus his lips to wet,
His eyes were sparkling, and—it might not be—
I thought he whispered low "Lysidice!"

PHILENION.

Behind that tree, and where the olives throw
A silver shadow on the leaves below,
Say, hast thou been?

LYSIDICE.

Yea, where the boughs divide
And show, half nestled in the dim hill-side
A noiseless and untrampled place of tombs.
Thou weepest, sister, for the lamp illumes
The shining fringes of those sweetest eyes?

PHILENION.

Ah! child, thou knowest not what sorrow lies

In memory; thou art rich in thy to-day,
Let me go silent on a sadder way.

LYSIDICE.

A burning tear has dropped upon my hand.
Have I done ill? I cannot understand!

PHILENION.

Among the graves that fill that olive shade
I wandered once, just such a joyous maid
As thou. Within my circling hands I held
A young cicala, who, by song impelled,
Struck with his feet the cithern of his wings;
I laughed, inspired by all the amorous things
The sacred creature hinted, till I threw
Backward my head, and caught against the blue
A man's keen face that looked me through and through.

LYSIDICE.

Let me come nearer, for you whisper low.

PHILENION.

I spread my fingers, let the wild wings go,
Sprang to my feet, and would have fled, but he
Was swifter, and his arms encompassed me.
Beneath the shade he wooed my fears away,
And showed the channel where his shallop lay;
He lived upon the seas. Oh! strange and sweet
To sit at Aphrodite's awful feet!
Next morn I stole, and laid across her shrine
A fillet of these wine-dark locks of mine,
An ivy wreath, a grasshopper in gold.
She rose from out the tingling foam and cold;
She rules it still, and when I heard the roar
Of distant waves I prayed to her the more,
But all in vain.

LYSIDICE.

I too—but, sister, swear,
Reveal to none at all my foolish care,—

I, too, before the dawn to-day hung up
In Aphrodite's shrine my silver cup
Engraved with massy combats of old kings.

PHILENION.

I pray the gods that with all pleasant things
Thy life at all times may be crowned and blest,
May all the sweets into thy cup be pressed
That the sad gods forgot in mixing mine.

LYSIDICE.

Tell me what end came of this love of thine?

PHILENION.

There is but one fixed goal where love may fare
And every lover that the world shall bear;
After brief space or lengthened, weal or woe,
They downward and in solitude must go
Where the Queen sits with poppies round her hair
Brief was our time for passion, scant and rare

The hours of pleasure in my life have been.
One chill October night when airs were keen,
And I within the quiet house began
To clear the soft white spinning wool a span
Forth from my knees, and thou wert bent to hold
The oil-press slowly oozing liquid gold,
Silent, before the fire, we two alone,
There came out of the dark a wailing moan,—
His voice in vision,—and I rose, but thou
Heard'st nothing, and knew'st nothing of my woe.
I felt that far away at sea his breath
Had called on mine at the last hour of death,
And through the thundering foam and roaring tide
My heart had heard the whisper as he died.
Yea, Aphrodite, to whom sea-wives pray,
Had heard my prayer in her own mystic way.

LYSIDICE.

Sweetest, I dare not look into thine eyes,
So pure and sad, so tender and so wise;
What shall I do to make thy heart forget

My foolish hardness? See, my cheeks are wet
With passionate falling of remorseful tears.

PHILENION.

Thou hast the spring-tide lightness of thy years,
Sister! Behold, my arms are open wide,
Those vain reproaches in this bosom hide!
Dream not that life has lost all bliss for me,
Content to love and live again in thee.
Fair throbbing head, and flowing wealth of tress
Alive in its own glancing loveliness,
Soft neck, warm hands, and best of all, I know,
Clear virgin heart fast beating down below,
These are my loves, and till that sacred hour
When Love shall crown thee with his mother's flower,
And I into the strong hands of a man
Shall give thee, as a sister only can,
These are my care, and all my life shall be
Absorbed in conquering thy destiny;
What woes the gods may for our heads prepare,
With cheerful countenance and instant prayer,

I will prevail that I alone may bear.
But when that day of days at last shall dawn
When underneath the platan on the lawn
Our hands suspend the wreath of dripping buds,
Your lotos-garland, starred with multitudes
Of nuptial blossoms steeped in rich perfume,
When all the maidens throng to view the room
Along whose walls the town's best art provides
Sweet amorous stories incident to brides,
When crowned with hyacinths, a chorus loud,
The virgins chant thy praises in a crowd,
And only hush, when on the ground they pour
The fragrant oil, one last libation more,—
Then, darling, oh! may I be there to weep
Still tears of ecstasy that downward creep,
May holy Cypris round thy body twine
The sacred girdle of her charm divine,
And then may Love, all swallowed up in thee,
Forget, yea! even in dreams, to visit me.

THE FARM.

To H. T.

FAR in the soft warm west
There lies an orchard-nest,
Where every spring the black-caps come
And build themselves a downy home.

The apple-boughs entwine,
And make a network fine
Through which the morning vapours pass
That rise from off the dewy grass.

And when the spring-warmth shoots
Along the apple roots,
The gnarled old boughs grow full of buds
That gleam and leaf in multitudes.

And then, first cold and white,
Soon flushing with delight,
The blossom-heads come out and blow
And mimic sunset-tinted snow.

Just where my farm-house ends
A single gable bends,
And one small window, ivy-bound,
Looks into this enchanted ground.

I sit there while I write,
And dream in the dim light
That floods the misty orchard through,
A pale-green vapour tinged with blue.

And watch the growing year,
The flowers that spring and peer,
The apple-bloom that melts away,
The colours of the changing day.

The falling blossom fills
The cups of daffodils,
That loll their perfume-haunted heads
Along the feathery parsley-beds.

And then the young girls come
To take the gold flowers home ;
They stand there, laughing, lilac-white,
Within the orchard's green twilight.

The rough old walls decay,
And moulder day by day,
The fern-roots tear them, stone by stone,
The ivy drags them, overgrown ;

But still they serve to keep
This little shrine of sleep
Intact for singing birds and bees
And lovers no less shy than these.

Soft perfumes blown my way
Remind me day by day
How spring and summer flowers arrange
Their aromatic interchange.

For, in the still warm night,
I taste the faint delight
Of dim white violets that lie
Far down in depths of greenery.

And from the wild white rose
That in my window blows,
At dawn an odour pure and fine
Comes drifting like the scent of wine.

I live in flower and tree;
My own life seems to me
A fading trifle scarcely worth
The notice of the jocund earth.

Nor seems it strange indeed
To hold the happy creed
That all fair things that bloom and die
Have conscious life as well as I.

That not in vain arise
The speedwell's azure eyes,
Like stars upon the river's brink,
That shine unseen of us, and sink.

That not for Man is made
All colour, light and shade,
All beauty ripened out of sight,—
But to fulfil its own delight.

The black-caps croon and swing
Deep in the night, and sing
No songs in which man's life is blent,
But to embody their content.

Then let me joy to be
Alive with bird and tree,
And have no haughtier aim than this—
To be a partner in their bliss.

So shall my soul at peace
From anxious carping cease,
Fed slowly like a wholesome bud
With sap of healthy thoughts and good.

That when at last I die,
No praise may earth deny,
But with her living forms combine
To chant a threnody divine.

THE PIPE-PLAYER.

Cool, and palm-shaded from the torrid heat,
The young brown tenor puts his singing by,
And sets the twin pipe to his lips to try
Some air of bulrush-glooms where lovers meet;
O swart musician, time and fame are fleet,
Brief all delight, and youth's feet fain to fly!
Pipe on in peace! To-morrow must we die?
What matter, if our life to-day be sweet!
Soon, soon, the silver paper-reeds that sigh
Along the Sacred River will repeat
The echo of the dark-stoled bearers' feet,
Who carry you, with wailing, where must lie
Your swathed and withered body, by and by,
In perfumed darkness with the grains of wheat.

IN THE BAY.

FAR out to east one streak of golden light
Shows where the lines of sea and heaven unite,—
White heaven shot through with film of flying cloud,
Gray sea the wind just flutters and makes bright,
And wakes to music neither low nor loud.

Two horns jut out, and join, and rim the bay,
Save where a snow-white strip of shingle may
Break through the bar, where, black as black can be.
Their steep and hollow rocks resound all day
The jarred susurrus of the tumbling sea.

Here on a sunny shelf, while hot the air
Flooded our limbs and faces, brown and bare,
We lounged and shouted, plashing with slow feet
The warm and tidal pools that wasted there,
And down below us saw the sea-foam beat.

Then, leaping down together with a cry,
I watched them dash into the waves, and fly
  Around the shallows as a sea-bird bends,
Tossing the froth and streaming, and then I
  Plunged like Arion to my dolphin-friends.

The cool impassive water clung and pressed
Around our buoyant bodies, head and breast;
  Downward I sank through green and liquid gloom,
By all the streams of shoreward seas caressed,
  Dark vitreous depths by faint cross-lights illumed.

And rising once again to sunlit air
We flung the salt-drip back from beard and hair,
  And shouted to the sun, and knew no more
The trodden earth, with all its pain and care,
  But set our faces sea-ward from the shore.

Then, lo! the narrow streak of eastern light
Along the dark sea's line, began to smite

Its radiance high up heaven; the flying mist
Sped from the sky, and left it gold and white,
And made the tossing sea like amethyst.

Midway between the rocks that girt the bay,
An islet rose, of rock as black as they;
Sombre it stood against the glowing sky,
And two of us swam out to it straightway,
And cleft the waves with strenuous arm and thigh;

And as I strove and wrestled in the race,
I turned and saw my comrade's merry face;
The sunlight fell upon his hair, and through
The film of water showed the sinewy grace
Of white limbs, bright against the sea's green-blue.

So, laughingly, we won the rock, and then
Climbed up and waited for our fellow-men;
Sat on the eastward brink of it, and let
The cold foam cling upon our feet again,
And plash our limbs with tangle crushed and wet.

There, holding back the wet hair from my eyes,
The moment seized me with its strange surprise;
  Straightway I lost all sense of present things
And, in the spirit, as an eagle flies,
  I floated to the sunrise on wide wings.

Some antique frenzy sliding through my brain
Made natural thought a moon upon the wane,
  Fast fading in a vague and silvery sky;—
I know not if such moments be not gain;
  They teach us, surely, what it is to die.

But suddenly my comrade spoke; the sound
Recalled my soul again to common ground;
  And now, like sea-gods on a holiday,
My friends were tumbling in the foam around,
  And made the waters hoary with their play.

With that, I spread my naked arms, and drew
My hands together o'er my head, and knew

That all was changing into cool repose,
And while into the pulsing deep I flew,
My glad heart sang its greeting; ah! who knows

What power the sea may have to understand,
Since all night long it whispers to the land,
And moans along the shallows, and cries out
Where skerries in the lonely channels stand,
And sounds in drowning ears a mighty shout?

"Sea that I love, with arms extended wide,
I clasp you as the bridegroom clasps the bride;
Strong sea, receive me throbbing; close me round
With tender firm embracings! Not denied,
I plunge and revel in thy cool profound!

"There are who fear thee; what have I to fear?
Lover, whose frowns and very wrath are dear!
Shake out the odours of the windy waves,
Sound thy dim music that my ears may hear;
I shall not tremble, though thy channels rave!

"Have I not known thee? Lo! thy breath was mild
About my body when I was a child;
My hair was blanched with sea-winds full of brine;
No voice beguiled me as thy voice beguiled;
The loveliest face my childhood knew was thine!

"Then on the shore in shadow; but to-day
I plunge far out into the sun-lit spray;
A child's heart gave thee all a child's heart can,
But now I love thee in a bolder way,
And take the fiercer pastime of a man.

"Nor I alone enjoy thee! Here a score,
Comrades of mine and still a million more
Might leap to thee; thou wouldst rejoice again,
Like her of old whose mystic body bore
As many breasts as there are mouths of men!

"Clinging, thy cool spray makes us thine alone;
We have no human passion of our own;

Here all is thine, prone body and dumb soul;
Thine for thy waves to dash, thy foam to crown,
Thy circling eddies to caress and roll!"

With that I shot along the glittering sea,
Parting the foam, and plunging full of glee,
Tossed back my tangled hair, and struck far out
Where orient sunrise paved a path for me,
And whispering waves returned my lyric shout.

Behind me and around me, lithe and fair,
Like Triton-kings at sport my comrades were,—
Some tossing conches that they had dived to find,
Some spreading ruddy limbs and sunshot hair
To woo the soft cool kisses of the wind.

It seemed the sea had heard my hymn of praise,
And laughed beneath the torrid sky ablaze;
The pure green water lapped us, warm and red;
The sweet life throbbed in us in wondrous ways;
We let the sunlight stream on hands and head.

Ah! for the sky put off its robe of gold;
A sharp wind blew out of a cloudy fold;
The bitter sea but mocked us! To the core
The keen breeze pierced us with a cutting cold,
And sad and numb we huddled to the shore.

So pass life's ecstasies, and yet, ah me!
What sorrow if no change should ever be,
Since, out of grieving at a present blight,
Come sweeter wafts of garnered memory,
And sweeter yearning for a new delight.

And but for that chill end in rain and wind,
I know not if my changing brain would find
On its pallmpsest memories of that day,
When full of life and youth and careless mind
We dashed and shouted in the sunlit bay.

THE BALLAD OF DEAD CITIES.

TO A. L.

Where are the cities of the plain?
  And where the shrines of rapt Bethel?
And Calah built of Tubal-Cain?
  And Shinar whence King Amraphel
  Came out in arms and fought, and fell,
Decoyed into the pits of slime
  By Siddim, and sent sheer to hell;
Where are the cities of old time?

Where now is Karnak, that great fane,
  With granite built, a miracle?
And Luxor smooth without a stain,
  Whose graven scripture still we spell?
  The jackal and the owl may tell,
Dark snakes around their ruins climb,

They fade like echo in a shell;
Where are the cities of old time?

And where is white Shushan, again,
Where Vashti's beauty bore the bell,
And all the Jewish oil and grain
Were brought to Mithridath to sell,
Where Nehemiah would not dwell,
Because another town sublime
Decoyed him with her oracle?
Where are the cities of old time?

ENVOI.

Prince, with a dolorous, ceaseless knell,
Above their wasted toil and crime
The waters of oblivion swell:
Where are the cities of old time?

THE BATH.

With rosy palms against her bosom pressed
To stay the shudder that she dreads of old,
Lysidice glides down, till silver-cold
The water girdles half her glowing breast;
A yellow butterfly on flowery quest
Rifles the roses that her tresses hold:
A breeze comes wandering through the fold on fold
Of draperies curtaining her shrine of rest.
Soft beauty, like her kindred petals strewed
Along the crystal coolness, there she lies.
What vision gratifies those gentle eyes?
She dreams she stands where yesterday she stood,
Where, while the whole arena shrieks for blood,
Hot in the sand a gladiator dies.

THE NEW ENDYMION.

Behind the ghostly poplar-trees
  The moon rose high when Celia died;
To win the flickering midnight breeze
  I'd thrown the curtains both aside,
And this was how I came to see,
In my most tearless agony,
The red moon in the poplar-tree.

The scent of lilies, sickly sweet,
  Just floated through the shining air,
And the hot perfume of the wheat
  Hung like a vapour everywhere;
The anguish of the summer night,
Close, breathless, sultry, still and bright,
Seemed without hope and infinite.

But most the round orb of the moon,
That one by one the branches kissed,
Drawn out of her flushed waking swoon,
And changed to gold above the mist,
Seemed like a rancorous enemy,
Who climbed by stairs into the sky
Better to see my darling die.

And I remembered, hushed at heart,
Without a tear, though she was dead,—
As if my future had no part
In that cold past upon the bed,—
I thought how much the moon had seen
Of happy days that lay between
The sweet may-be and sad has-been.

Quivering to feel how, every time
I forged another link of love,
The mystic moon had seemed to climb,
And watch my lips, and hang above;

I shuddered, and my thoughts I cast,
While all my veins were beating fast,
Across my memories of the past.

I thought of that clear tropic night,
When, like a bird, through Indian seas,
Our ship unfolded wings of light,
And lost the land by soft degrees:
She paced the deck; I heard the stir
Of robes, her beauty's minister,
And at the last I spoke to her.

But while our budding fortunes crossed,
Amid her courteous flights of speech,
My careless vision slowly lost
The range of palm-trees on the beach,
Whereat another light began
Behind the isles of Andaman,
And up the golden moonlight ran.

I turned and saw her gentle face,
Those violet moon-shot eyes I saw,
And in that very hour and place
Bent like a vassal to her law;
But yet I dared not speak, and soon
She rose and suddenly had gone,
And left me to the florid moon.

I thought me of a winter street,
And how the first time, on my arm,
I felt her gentle pulses beat
As in a virgin vague alarm;
We let the rest pass on before,
And talking lingered, more and more
Hid in the city's kindly roar.

The great crowd caught us in its net,
And pressed us closer to each other;
We spoke of all since last we met,
And laughed like sister and like brother;

I all the while, with fixed intent,
Towards some more serious silence bent
To say a certain thing I meant.

In vain,—till out of the blue night,
  Behind the vast cathedral spire,
There swam into our sudden sight
  A globe of honey-coloured fire,
And in the wonder of the view
She hushed her talking, and I knew
How kind her heart was and how true.

I thought, too, of the magic hour
  When in one sacred chamber bound,
She loosed her wreath of orange-flower,
  And dropped her wealth of hair uncrowned
And I, with tenderest fingers laced
About the slimness of her waist,
Her cool and cream-white throat embraced.

And through this window-pane we glanced
  And saw the silvery soft may-moon,—
Like some young mænad that hath danced
  Till her bright head is in a swoon,—
Lean up against the poplar-tree,
And in the wild wind we could see
The leaves fold round her amorously.

They folded round as sisters might
  Around a maiden sick to death,
Whom some perfidious churl and light
  Had cheated with delusive breath :
The moon's white face that golden hour
Had something of the tints that lour
About the aconite in flower.

Yet that last night when Celia died
  The moon's face had a stranger air,
A mien of victory, like a bride,
  Enchanted, resolute and fair :

Through all my sorrow, all my pain,
I gazed upon the orb again,
Till my pent anguish gushed in rain;

And then upon her face I fell,
My sweet, lost Celia's, and my arms
Clasped round once more the miracle
Of her divine and tender charms;
The room grew dark, I know not why,—
I gazed and saw that, suddenly,
The moon was ashy in the sky.

Then I arose and left the dead,
And wandered up into the wood,
Till briar and honeysuckle shed
A subtle odour where I stood:
And there, beneath the boughs that lie
Thin-leaved against the stars on high,
The moon swam down the liquid sky.

And since that night of pain and love
I have not felt as others feel,
An alien in their courts I move,
And from their noisy world I steal;
The common ways of life I shun,
And quit my comrades every one,
And live sequestered from the sun.

But when the crescent moon begins
To fill her slender bow with fire,
A dream upon my fancy wins,
I languish with a fond desire;
I stride along the mountain-tops,
But when behind their range she drops,
My heart within me leaps and stops.

But every month one night I lie
Upon the wild back of the hills,
And watch the hollow of the sky
Until the crystal dew distils;

And when the perfect moon appears
A golden paragon of spheres,
I rise a god among my peers.

Twelve times within the weary year
That marvellous hour of joy returns,
And till its rapture reappear
My pulse is like a flame that burns;
I have no wonder, now, nor care
For any woman's hands or hair,
For any face, however fair.

Ah! what am I that she should bend
Her glorious godship down to me?
My mortal weakness cannot lend
Fresh light to her vast deity!
I know not! only this I know—
She loves me, she has willed it so,
And blindly in her light I go.

Sweet, make me as a mountain pool

With thy soft radiance mirrored o'er,
Or like the moon-fern, gray and cool,
That hides thy virtue in its core;
I must grow old and pass away;
Thou art immortal; love, I pray,
Bend o'er me on my fatal day!

WIND OF PROVENCE.

O WIND of Provence, subtle wind that blows
Through coverts of the impenetrable rose,
  O musical soft wind, come near to me,
  Come down into these hollows by the sea,
O wind of Provence, heavy with the rose!

How once along the blue sea's battlements
Thy amorous rose-trees poured their spicy scents!
  The heavy perfume streamed down granite walls,
  Where now the prickly cactus gibes and crawls
Down towards cold waves from grim rock-battlements.

Of all the attar, sharp and resinous,
The spines and stalks alone are left for us,

And so much sickly essence as may cleave
About the hands of maidens when they weave
Wild roses into wreaths of bloom for us.

Where are the old days vanished, ah! who knows!
When all the wide world blossomed with the rose,
When all the world was full of frank desire,
When love was passion and when flowers were fire,
Where are the old days vanished, ah! who knows?

Come down, O wind of Provence, sing again
In my lulled ears, for quenching of all pain,
The litany of endless amorous hours,
The song of songs that blossomed with the flowers,
And brightened when the flowers decayed again.

When Ermengarde, the lady of Narbonne,
Star-like above the silken tourney shone,
With powdered gold upon her ruddy hair;
There was no woman anywhere so fair
As Ermengarde, the glory of Narbonne!

Love's ladies paced the sward beneath all towers,
Their grass-green satins stirred the daisy-flowers;
No knight or dame was pale with spent desire,
For pleasure served them as an altar-fire;
Their mortal spirits faded like soft flowers.

Some wreaths and robes, a lute with mouldered strings,
One clear perennial song on deathless wings,
Still tell us later men of those delights
That filled their happy days and passionate nights,
While Life smote gaily on his tense harp-strings.

Now cold earth covers all of them with death;
The gray world travels on with failing breath,
Long having passed her prime, and twilight comes,
And some men wait for dream-millenniums,
But most are gathering up their robes for death.

The old air hangs about us cold and strange;
We stand like blind men, wistful for a change,
But only darkness lies on either hand,

And in a sinister, unlovely land,
We cling together, waiting for the change.

But in this little interval of rest
May one not press the rose-flower to his breast,
The sanguine rose whose passionate delight
In amorous days of old was infinite,
And now, like some narcotic, sings of rest?

So be it! I, the child of this last age,
To whom the shadow of death is heritage,
Will set my face to dream against the past;
This time of tears and trouble cannot last,
The dawn must some time herald a new age.

Till then, O wind of Provence, thrill my brain
With musk and terebinth and dewy rain
From over-luscious roses, and declare
That wine is delicate and woman fair;
O wind of Provence, shall I call in vain?

RONDEAU.

If Love should faint, and half decline
Below the fit meridian sign,
And shorn of all his golden dress,
His royal state and loveliness,
Be no more worth a heart like thine,
Let not thy nobler passion pine,
But, with a charity divine,
Let Memory ply her soft address
If Love should faint;
And oh! this laggard heart of mine,
Like some halt pilgrim stirred with wine,
Shall ache in pity's dear distress,
Until the balms of thy caress
To work the finished cure combine,
If Love should faint.

MOORLAND.

Now the buttercups of May
Twinkle fainter day by day,
  And the stalks of flowering clover
  Make the June fields red all over,—

Now the cuckoo, like a bell,
Modulates a sad farewell,
  And the nightingale, perceiving
  Love's warm tokens, ends her grieving,—

Let us twain arise and go
Where the freshening breezes blow,
  Where the granite giant moulders
  In his circling cairn of boulders!

Just a year ago to-day,
Friend, we climbed the self-same way,
  Through the village-green, and higher
  Past the smithy's thundering fire ;

Up and up and where the hill
Wound us by the cider-still ;
  Where the scythers from the meadow
  Sat along the hedge for shadow ;

Where the little wayside inn
Signals that the moors begin,
  Ah ! remember all our laughter,
  Loitering at the bar,—and after !

All must be the same to-day,
All must look the same old way,
  Only that the sweet child-maiden
  We admired so well, fruit-laden,

Now, like an expanded bud,
Must be blown to womanhood,
And the fuller lips and bosom
Must proclaim the perfect blossom.

One step more! Before us, lo!
Sheer the great ravine below,
Empty, save where one brown plover
Wheels across the ferny cover!

Here, where all the valley lies
Like a scroll before our eyes,
Let us spend our golden leisure
In a world of lazy pleasure.

Comrade, let your heart forget
All the thoughts that fray and fret;
Till the sun-down flares out yonder,
Stretch here in the fern, and ponder.

See, below us, where the stream
Winds with broken silver gleam,
  How the nervous quivering sallows
  Bend and dare not touch the shallows!

In that willow-shaded pool,
When last June the airs were cool,
  How we made the hot noon shiver
  With our plunge into the river.

In the sweet sun, side by side
You and I and none beside!
  Head and hands, thrown backward, slacken,
  Sunk into the soft warm bracken.

Up in heaven a milky sky
Floats across us leisurely;
  When we close our eyes, the duller
  Half-light seems a faint red colour.

In this weary life of ours
Pass too many leaden hours ;
  In our chronicles of passion
  Too much apes the world's dull fashion.

If our spirits strive to be
Pure and high in their degree,
  Let us learn the soaring pæan
  Under God's own empyrean.

Leisure in the sun and air
Makes the spirit strong and fair ;
  Flaccid veins and pallid features
  Are not fit for sky-born creatures.

Come then, for the hours of May
Wane and falter, day by day,
  And the thrushes' first June chorus
  Will have walked the woods before us !

THE GOLDEN ISLES.

To J. A. S.

SAD would the salt waves be,
And cold the singing sea,
And dark the gulfs that echo to the seven-stringed lyre,
If things were what they seem,
If life had no fair dream,
No mirage made to tip the dull sea-line with fire.

Then Sleep would have no light,
And Death no voice or sight;
Their sister Sorrow, too, would be as blind as they;
And in this world of doubt
Our souls would roam about,
And find no song to sing and no word good to say.

Or else, in cloud and gloom
The soul would read her doom,
And sing a rune obscure above a murky sea,
Dark phrases that would wrong
The crystal fount of song,
Since limpid as a pearl the poet's thought should be.

Not in the storm and rain,
Not pale with grief and pain,
But red with sunlit pulse and breathing health and hope,
The bard in garments gay
Should tread the sacred way
That leads him towards his god high up the laurelled slope.

But on the shores of time,
Hearkening the breakers' chime
Falling by night and day along our human sand,
The poet sits and sees,
Borne on the morning breeze,
The phantom islands float a furlong from the land.

The reverend forms they bear
Of islands famed and fair,
On whose keen rocks, of old, heroic fleets have struck,
Whose marble dells have seen
In flowing garments green
The ocean nymphs go by to bring the shepherds luck.

White are their crags, and blue
Ravines divide them through,
And like a violet shell their cliffs recede from sight;
Between their fretted capes
Fresh isles in lovely shapes
Die on the horizon pale, and lapse in liquid light.

Past that dim straitened shore,
The Argive mother bore
The boy she brought to Zeus, pledge of the golden fee;
Here Delos, like a gem,
Still feels Latona's hem;
A lordlier Naxos crowns a purpler arc of sea.

There mines of Parian lie
Hid from the sun's clear eye,
And waiting still the lamp, the hammer, and the axe ;
And he who, pensive, sees
These nobler Cyclades
Forgets the ills of life, and nothing mortal lacks.

But many an one, in vain,
Puts out across the main,
And thinks to leap on land and tread that magic shore ;
He comes, for all his toil,
No nearer to their soil,—
The isles are floating on, a furlong still before.

So he contends, until
The storm-wind, harsh and chill,
Beats on his sail, and blots the heaven with cloud and flame,
And well indeed he fares,
After a world of cares,
Returning, if he reach the harbour whence he came.

The poet sits and smiles,
He knows the Golden Isles,
He never hopes to win their cliffs, their marble mines,
Reefs where their green sea raves,
The coldness of their caves,
Their felspars full of light, their rosy corallines.

All these he oft has sought,
Led by his travelling thought,
Their glorious distance hides no inward charm from him;
He would not have their day
To common light decay,
He loves their mystery best, and bids their shapes be dim.

They solace all his pains,
They animate his strains,
Within their radiant glow he soon forgets the world;
They bathe his torrid noons
In the soft light of moons,
They leave his lingering evenings tenderly empearled.

As one who walks all day
Along a dusty way,
May turn aside to plunge in some sequestered pool,
And so may straight forget
His weariness and fret,—
So seeks the poet's heart those highlands blue and cool.

Content to know them there,
Hung in the shining air,
He trims no foolish sail to win the hopeless coast,
His vision is enough
To feed his soul with love,
And he who grasps too much may even himself be lost.

He knows that, if he waits,
One day the well-worn gates
Of life will ope and send him westward o'er the wave;
Then will he reach ere night
The isles of his delight,
But they must float until they anchor in the grave.

SUNSHINE BEFORE SUNRISE.

THE ice-white mountains clustered all around us,
But arctic summer blossomed at our feet;
The perfume of the creeping sallows found us,
The cranberry-flowers were sweet.

The reindeer champed the ghostly moss, and over
The sparkling peak that crowned the dim ravine
The sky was violet-blue; and loved by lover
We clung, and lay half-seen.

Below us through the valley crept a river,
Cleft round an island where the Lap-men lay;
Its sluggish water dragged with slow endeavour
The mountain-snows away.

One thin blue curl of wood-smoke rose up single,—
The only sign of life the valley gave;
But where the fern-roots and the streamlets mingle
Our hearts were warm and brave.

My arm was round her small head sweetly fashioned,
Her bright head shapely as a hyacinth-bell;
So silent were we that our hearts' impassioned
Twin throb was audible.

Alas! for neither knew the language spoken
Amongst the people whence the other came;
A few brief words were all we had for token,
And just each other's name.

"*My love is pure as this blue heaven above you*"
I said,—but saw she let the meaning slip;
"*Jeg elsker Dem*," I felt must be, "*I love you!*"
And answered, lip to lip.

Oh! how the tender throbbing of her bosom
Beat, bird-like, crushed to mine in that embrace,

While blushes, like the light through some red blossom,
Dyed all her dewy face.

There is no night-time in the northern summer,
But golden shimmer fills the hours of sleep,
And sunset fades not, till the bright new-comer,
Red sunrise, smites the deep.

But when the blue snow-shadows grew intenser
Across the peaks against the golden sky,
And on the hills the knots of deer grew denser,
And raised their tender cry,

And wandered downward to the Lap-men's dwelling,
We knew our long sweet day was nearly spent,
And slowly, with our hearts within us swelling,
Our homeward steps we bent.

Down rugged paths and torrents mad with foaming,
With clinging hands, we loitered, blind with joy,
I thought a long life spent like this in roaming
Would never tire or cloy.

And very late we saw before us, dreaming,
The red-roofed town where all her days had been,
And far beyond, half shaded and half gleaming,
The blue sea, flecked with green.

Ah! sweet is life and sweet is youth's young passion,
And sweet the first kiss on a girl's warm cheek;
Since then we both have learnt in broken fashion
Each other's tongues to speak;

And many days and nights of love and pleasure
Have laid their fragrant chaplets on our hair,
And many hours of eloquent wise leisure
Have made our lives seem fair;

But Memory knows not where so white a place is
In all her shining catalogue of hours,
As that one day of silent warm embraces
Among the cranberry-flowers.

SONG.

THERE'S a sleek thrush sits in the apple-tree
When it blooms all over with rosy snow,
And hark! how he opens his heart to me,
Till its inmost hopes and desires I know!
Blow, wind, blow,
For the thrush will fly when the bloom must go.

O a friend I had, and I loved him well,
And his heart was open and sang to mine,
And it pains me more than I choose to tell,
That he cares no more if I laugh or pine:
Friend of mine,
Can the music fade out of love like thine!

SESTINA.

"Fra tutti il primo Arnaldo Daniello
Gran maestro d'amor."—*Petrarch.*

In fair Provence, the land of lute and rose,
Arnaut, great master of the lore of love,
First wrought sestines to win his lady's heart,
Since she was deaf when simpler staves he sang,
And for her sake he broke the bonds of rhyme,
And in this subtler measure hid his woe.

"Harsh be my lines," cried Arnaut, "harsh the woe
My lady, that enthorn'd and cruel rose,
Inflicts on him that made her live in rhyme!"
But through the metre spake the voice of Love,

And like a wild-wood nightingale he sang
Who thought in crabbed lays to ease his heart.

It is not told if her untoward heart
Was melted by her poet's lyric woe,
Or if in vain so amorously he sang;
Perchance through cloud of dark conceits he rose
To nobler heights of philosophic love,
And crowned his later years with sterner rhyme.

This thing alone we know: the triple rhyme
Of him who bared his vast and passionate heart
To all the crossing flames of hate and love,
Wears in the midst of all its storm of woe,—
As some loud morn of March may bear a rose,—
The impress of a song that Arnaut sang.

"Smith of his mother-tongue," the Frenchman sang
Of Lancelot and of Galahad, the rhyme
That beat so bloodlike at its core of rose,
It stirred the sweet Francesca's gentle heart

To take that kiss that brought her so much woe
And sealed in fire her martyrdom of love.

And Dante, full of her immortal love,
Stayed his drear song, and softly, fondly sang
As though his voice broke with that weight of woe ;
And to this day we think of Arnaut's rhyme
Whenever pity at the labouring heart
On fair Francesca's memory drops the rose.

Ah ! sovereign Love, forgive this weaker rhyme !
The men of old who sang were great at heart,
Yet have we too known woe, and worn thy rose.

ON A LUTE FOUND IN A SARCOPHAGUS.

To L. A. T.

WHAT curled and scented sun-girls, almond-eyed,
With lotos-blossoms in their hands and hair,
Have made their swarthy lovers call them fair,
With these spent strings, when brutes were deified,
And Memnon in the sunrise sprang and cried,
And love-winds smote Bubastis, and the bare
Black breasts of carven Pasht received the prayer
Of suppliants bearing gifts from far and wide!
This lute has out-sung Egypt; all the lives
Of violent passion, and the vast calm art
That lasts in granite only, all lie dead;
This little bird of song alone survives,
As fresh as when its fluting smote the heart
Last time the brown slave wore it garlanded.

SONGS FROM "KING ERIK" (1876).

I.

Autumn closes
Round the roses,
Shatters, strips them, head by head;
Winter passes
O'er the grasses,
Turns them yellow, brown and red;
Can a lover
E'er recover
When his summer love is dead?

Yet the swallow
Turns to follow
In the northward wake of spring,
To refashion
Wasted passion

With a sweep of his dark wing,
As returning
Love flies burning
To those stricken lips that sing.

II.

I bring a garland for your head,
Of blossoms fresh and fair,
My own hands wound their white and red
To ring about your hair:
Here is a lily, here a rose,
A warm narcissus that scarce blows,
And fairer blossoms no man knows.

So crowned and chapleted with flowers,
I pray you be not proud;
For after brief and summer hours
Comes autumn with a shroud;—
Though fragrant as a flower you lie,
You and your garland, bye and bye,
Will fade and wither up and die.

SONGS FROM "THE UNKNOWN LOVER"

(1878).

I.

SOFT she seems as flowers and dew,
Mild as skies in summer,
But let old love change for new
She'll wake with the new-comer;
All and each
She will teach
In a froward fashion!
Leopards wild
Fear this child
Roused to fire and passion!

Cease to chide a maid's desire,
Vain your best endeavour;

You'll but waste your threats and ire,
She will heed you never;
You may bind
Storm and wind,
You may curb the ocean,
But in vain
Strive to chain
Woman's mad devotion.

II.

Chloë is false, but the fire in her eyes
Rouses her lovers with thousand sweet delusions;
Cælia is true, and, too true to be wise,
Breaks, like a dream, all their amorous illusions.

Lovers are weak, and they ask not to know
All that lies under the rose-leaves and the laughter;
Wisdom may call, but to pleasure they go,
Cælia they honour, but Chloë they run after.

WITH A BIRTHDAY GIFT OF WEBSTER'S PLAYS.

POET and Friend! Pause while the bells of Time
Ring out this great division of your days,
And let the cadence of these sombre plays
Be the grave echo of their silver chime;
And as you slowly up to glory climb,
Nigh fainting in the lower thorny ways,
Take solace from the eternal wreath of bays
That crowns at last this weary brow sublime;
His was a soul whose calm intensity
Glared, shadeless, at the passion-sun that blinds,
Unblinded, till the storm of song arose;—
Even as the patient and Promethean sea
Tosses in sleep, until the vulture winds
Swoop down and tear the breast of its repose.

EROS.

WITHIN a forest, as I strayed
Far down a sombre autumn glade,
I found the god of love;
His bow and arrows cast aside;
His lovely arms extended wide,
A depth of leaves above,
Beneath o'erarching boughs he made
A place for sleep in russet shade.

His lips, more red than any rose,
Were like a flower that overflows
With honey pure and sweet;
And clustering round that holy mouth,
The golden bees in eager drouth
Plied busy wings and feet;
They knew, what every lover knows,
There's no such honey-bloom that blows.

LÜBECK.

We sat in Lübeck underneath
  The lindens of the minster-close;
Round us the city, still as death,
  Was gathered like a rose.

The great red tower sprang over us,
  Far up a dome of sapphire glow
More vast and clear and luminous
  Than English summers know.

Faint flutings of the fluctuant breeze
  Sang from the orchards out of sight,
And whispered through the linden-trees,
  And stirred the shadowy light.

And, whistling low, a gooseherd came,
And led his flock across the grass ;
And then we saw a burgher dame,
Demurely smiling, pass.

We sucked the juice from tangled skeins
Of currants, rosy-red and white,
And in the wind the ancient vanes
Were creaking out of sight.

And little maidens, too, came by,
And shook their tails of flaxen hair ;
We held a conclave, small and shy,
To taste our juicy fare ;

Then, wandering down by mouldering towers,
We reached at last a little knoll ;
And there, among the pansy-flowers,
We read of " Atta Troll."

How sweetly in the falling light
The broad still river, like a moat,

Swung, with its water-lilies white,
And yellow buds afloat !

A little matter ! but such moods
Make up the sum of happy hours ;
In uncongenial solitudes
They come to us like flowers.

So lay that afternoon to sleep
Among your dearest pansy-knots,—
The hushed herbarium where you keep
Your heart's forget-me-nots.

D. G. R.

MASTER, whose very names have god-like power
Of song and light divine, being his who went
Unscathed through blearing fire omnipotent,
Singing for men; and his who hour by hour
Stands in the imminent and splendid shower
Of God's effulgence; and being lastly blent
With the warm light and odour effluent
Of your own rhymes, our latest, loveliest dower,
Not in our own land could my weakness mock
Your strength with homage of my poor May-day,—
The applause of circling poets scared my song,
But here where twenty thousand thunders shock
The violent air for leagues of dim sea-way,
Surely my heart may speak, nor do you wrong!

Outside Bergen Harbour, Aug. 1871.

TO MY DAUGHTER TERESA.

THOU hast the colours of the Spring,
The gold of kingcups triumphing,
The blue of wood-bells wild ;
But winter-thoughts thy spirit fill,
And thou art wandering from us still,
Too young to be our child.

Yet have thy fleeting smiles confessed,
Thou dear and much desirèd guest,
That home is near at last ;
Long lost in high mysterious lands,
Close by our door thy spirit stands,
Its journey well-nigh past.

Oh sweet bewildered soul, I watch
The fountains of thine eyes, to catch
New fancies bubbling there,
To feel our common light, and lose
The flush of strange ethereal hues
Too dim for us to share !

Fade, cold immortal lights, and make
This creature human for my sake,
Since I am nought but clay ;
An angel is too fine a thing
To sit behind my chair and sing,
And cheer my passing day.

I smile, who could not smile, unless
The air of rapt unconsciousness
Passed, with the fading hours ;
I joy in every childish sign
That proves the stranger less divine
And much more meekly ours.

I smile, as one by night who sees,
Through mist of newly-budded trees,
The clear Orion set,
And knows that soon the dawn will fly
In fire across the riven sky,
And gild the woodlands wet.

ALCYONE.

SONNET.

PHŒBUS.

WHAT voice is this that wails above the deep?

ALCYONE.

A wife's, that mourns her fate and loveless days.

PHŒBUS.

What love lies buried in these water-ways?

ALCYONE.

A husband's, hurried to eternal sleep.

PHŒBUS.

Cease, O beloved, cease to wail and weep!

ALCYONE.

Wherefore?

PHŒBUS.

The waters in a fiery blaze
Proclaim the godhead of my healing rays.

ALCYONE.

No god can sow where fate hath stood to reap.

PHŒBUS.

Hold, wringing hands! cease, piteous tears, to fall!

ALCYONE.

But grief must rain and glut the passionate sea.

PHŒBUS.

Thou shalt forget this ocean and thy wrong,
And I will bless the dead, though past recall.

ALCYONE.

What canst thou give to me or him in me?

PHŒBUS.

A name in story and a light in song.

THE WELL.

LIKE this cold and mossy fount
  Which forgets the sun at noon,
Sees just stars enough to count,
  And a vision of the moon,—

Where the little stems and leaves,
  Round the edges of the well,
Quiver, while the water grieves,
  At the tale it has to tell,—

Where your bright face, peering through
  Two soft clouds of falling hair,
Sees a dim and troubled view
  Of its own clear beauty there,—

Such my heart is ; in it lies
  Your dear image all day long,
But 'tis stirred with fears and sighs,
  And its dimness does you wrong.

PERFUME.

WHAT gift for passionate lovers shall we find?
Not flowers nor books of verse suffice for me,
But splinters of the odorous cedar-tree,
And tufts of pine-buds, oozy in the wind;
Give me young shoôts of aromatic rind,
Or samphire, redolent of sand and sea,
For all such fragrances I deem to be
Fit with my sharp desires to be combined.
My heart is like a poet, whose one room,
Scented with Latakia faint and fine,
Dried rose leaves, and spilt attar, and old wine,
From curtained windows gathers its warm gloom
Round all but one sweet picture, where incline
His thoughts and fancies mingled with perfume.

VILLANELLE.

LITTLE mistress mine, good-bye !
I have been your sparrow true ;
Dig my grave, for I must die.

Waste no tear and heave no sigh ;
Life should still be blithe for you,
Little mistress mine, good-bye !

In your garden let me lie,
Underneath the pointed yew
Dig my grave, for I must die.

We have loved the quiet sky
With its tender arch of blue ;
Little mistress mine, goodbye !

That I still may feel you nigh,
In your virgin bosom, too,
Dig my grave, for I must die.

Let our garden friends that fly
Be the mourners, fit and few.
Little mistress mine, good-bye!
Dig my grave, for I must die.

1870-71.

THE year that Henry Regnault died,—
The sad red blossoming year of war,—
All nations cast the lyre aside,
And gazed through curvëd fingers far
At horror, waste, and wide.

Not one new song from overseas
Came to us; who had ears to hear?
The kings of Europe's minstrelsies
Walked, bowed, behind the harrowing year,
Veiled, silent, ill at ease,

For us the very name of man
Grew hateful in that mist of blood;

We talked of how new life began
To exiles by the eastern flood,
Flower-girdled in Japan.

We dreamed of new delight begun
In palm-encircled Indian shoals,
Where men are coloured by the sun,
And wear out contemplative souls,
And vanish one by one.

We found no pleasure any more
In all the whirl of Western thought;
The dreams that soothed our souls before
Were burst like bubbles, and we sought
New hopes on a new shore.

The men who sang that pain was sweet
Shuddered to see the mask of death
Storm by with myriad thundering feet;
The sudden truth caught up our breath,
Our throats like pulses beat.

The songs of pale emaciate hours,
The fungus-growth of years of peace,
Withered before us like mown flowers;
We found no pleasure more in these,
When bullets fell in showers.

For men whose robes are dashed with blood,
What joy to dream of gorgeous stairs,
Stained with the torturing interlude
That soothed a Sultan's midday prayers,
In old days harsh and rude?

For men whose lips are blanched and white,
With aching wounds and torturing thirst,
What charm in canvas shot with light,
And pale with faces cleft and curst,
Past life and life's delight?

And when the war had passed, and song
Broke out amongst us once again,
As birds sing fresher notes among

The sunshot woodlands after rain,
And happier tones prolong,—

So seemed it with the lyric heart
Of human singers; fresher aims
Sprang in the wilderness of art,
Serener pathos, nobler claims
On man for his best part.

The times are changed; not Schumann now,
But Wagner is our music-man,
Whose flutes and trumpets throb and glow
With life, as when the world began
Its genial ebb and flow.

The great god Pan redeified
Comes, his old kingship to reclaim;
New hopes are spreading far and wide;
The lands were purged as with a flame,
The year that Regnault died.

DESIDERIUM.

SIT there for ever, dear, and lean
  In marble as in fleeting flesh,
Above the tall grey reeds that screen
  The river when the breeze is fresh;
For ever let the morning light
Stream down that forehead broad and white,
And round that cheek for my delight.

Already that flushed moment grows
  So dark, so distant; through the ranks
Of scented reed the river flows
  Still murmuring to its willowy banks;
But we can never hope to share
Again that rapture fond and rare,
Unless you turn immortal there.

There is no other way to hold
  These webs of mingled joy and pain;
Like gossamer their threads enfold
  The journeying heart without a strain,—
Then break, and pass in cloud or dew,
And while the ecstatic soul goes through
Are withered in the parching blue.

Hold, Time, a little while thy glass,
  And, Youth, fold up those peacock wings!
More rapture fills the years that pass
  Than any hope the future brings;
Some for to-morrow rashly pray,
And some desire to hold to-day,
But I am sick for yesterday.

Since yesterday the hills were blue
  That shall be gray for evermore,
And the fair sunset was shot through
  With colour never seen before!
Tyrannic love smiled yesterday,

And lost the terrors of his sway,
But is a god again to-day.

Ah! who will give us back the past?
Ah! woe, that youth should love to be
Like this swift Thames that speeds so fast,
And is so fain to find the sea,—
That leaves this maze of shadow and sleep,
These creeks down which blown blossoms creep,
For breakers of the homeless deep.

Then sit for ever, dear, in stone,
As when you turned with half a smile,
And I will haunt this islet lone,
And with a dream my tears beguile;
And in my reverie forget
That stars and suns were made to set,
That love grows old, or eyes are wet.

THE SUPPLIANT.

BENEATH the poplars o'er the sacred pool
The halcyons dart like rays of azure light,—
Fair presage! by the columns white and cool,
I'll watch till fall of night.

Perchance the goddess at the twilight's breath
Will come with silver feet and braidless hair,
And all too startled to decree my death,
Will hearken to my prayer.

So when at moon-rise by the farm I go,
The lovely girl who near the fig-tree stands,
May turn no more on scornful feet and slow,
But hold out both her hands.

THE HOUSELEEK.

To G. A. A.

GREEN houseleek, whose fair lady-love
Is my white dove,
Peer down from our slant tilèd roof and see
If in my garden any flower or tree
Grows but for me!

Else will I scatter yellow peas,
And at my ease
Will woo thy soft companion to my feet,
And in the darkness of my safe retreat,
Feel her heart beat;

And shut her in a golden cage,
And mock thy rage,

Till thy red spikes of blossom day by day
Beneath the winds and autumn suns decay,
And fade away.

Round houseleek, squat upon the tiles !
For miles and miles
Thou canst gaze far and wide ; look down for me
And tell me what thy cunning leaf can see,
Harsh though it be.

The roses only live for pride ;
The lilies died
Because the rough moth troubled their pure bells ;
Deep down within the columbine's blue cells
Some sadness dwells ;

The jonquils only breathe for God ;
A footstep trod
The hopeful-hearted pansy down to death ;
The honeysuckle overlavisheth
Her rich and luscious breath ;

Only the violet I trust:
Surely she must,
Being so sweet, so modest and so free,
And knowing how I love her utterly,
Be true to me?

O tell me, houseleek, thou must know,
Say, is it so?
Then may thy dove's pink feet upon the eaves
Perch all day long beside thy patient leaves,
While her throat grieves.

MY OWN GRAVE.

Imitated from Ronsard.

WHEN all my life is done
Beneath the pleasant sun,
When cold are breath and limb,
And eyes grown dim,

Before the whole live air
Grows dead to me, prepare
A cover for my face,
A resting-place.

Yet raise no splendid tomb,
Nor o'er my dust find room
For blazoned words, but let
The world forget.

In some sequestered spot,
Apart, concealed, remote,
Blown round by multitudes
Of breezy woods,

Broad skies above my head,
Green turf my body's bed,
And, flowing by my side,
A river wide.

There let me too forget
All sorrow, pain and fret,
Made one with flowers and trees,
And blithe like these.

Green spring, and sunlight shed
On summer's golden head,
Rich autumn warm with light,
And winter white,

Will bring, with various cheer,
The sweet revolving year,

And I shall rest below
And scarcely know.

Yet haply when there shoots
March life in crabbed roots,
My heart shall wake to feel
It upward steal.

The new-fledged birds shall bring
Me solace when they sing,
And stir the boughs that meet
Above my feet.

And when the bees in tune
Hum dreamily of June,
While over heaven on high
Soft clouds float by,

The long sweet grass will fade,
And in brown swathes be laid
By many a whistling scythe
Of mowers blithe ;

The men will whistle too
Till twilight brings the dew,
Then leave the fallen grass
And homeward pass.

Their singing, low and sweet,
Vibration of their feet,
The sense of youth again,
Will soothe my brain.

With face and limbs and hair
Dark on the misty air,
They'll pass my dreaming eyes,
When daylight dies.

And e'er September's wind
The elm-tree shade has thinned,
When rushes droop, and reeds
Shake out their seeds,

When autumn sunsets make
A glory through the brake,

And down the woodland glades
The amber fades,

Some maiden-heart on fire,
Shamed with her new desire,
Just waked to passionate will,
And trembling still,

Will come to hide her face
With all its girlish grace,
Where shining waters lave
My greenwood grave.

Her wealth of shining tress
And glowing cheek will bless
The cool fresh blades that start
Out of my heart.

There silent, hushed, alone,
No face to shame her own,
She'll give her quivering breast
One hour of rest.

And I, perchance, who know
So well the weal or woe
Of love, and oft before
Have taught its lore,

Through stress of love may gain
Some skill to quell her pain,
And send through blade and flower
Some magic power.

Howe'er it be, I know
That lying there below,
My quiet dust will stir
With joy in her;

That all her youth will be
Like noonday rain to me,
Her beauty like the sun
When rain is done.

Then let them shed no tear
Who hold my memory dear,

But pass and leave me there,
In woodland air.

Hemmed round by birds and bees,
To haunt the murmuring trees,
When all this life is done
Beneath the sun.

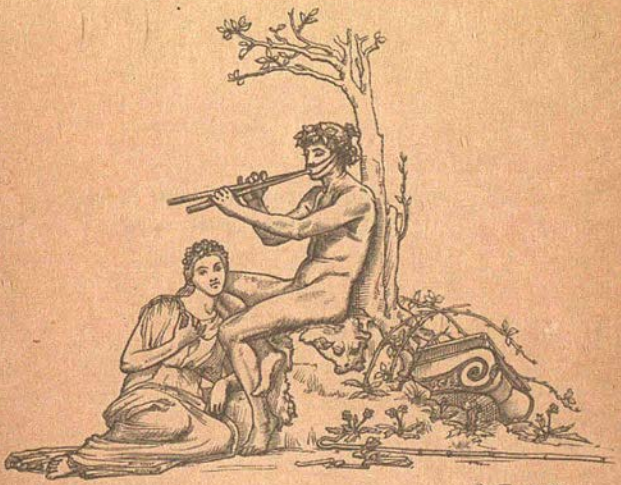
EPILOGUE.

If thou disdain the sacred muse,
  Beware lest Nature, past recall,
Indignant at that crime, refuse
  Thee entrance to her audience-hall,
  Beware lest sea, and sky, and all
That bears reflection of her face
  Be blotted with a hueless pall
Of unillumined commonplace.

The moving heavens, in rhythmic time,
  Roll, if thou watch them or refrain;
The waves upon the shore in rhyme
  Beat, heedless of thy loss or gain;
  Not they, but thou, hast lived in vain,
If thou art deaf and dumb and blind,

Parched in the heart of morning rain,
And on the flaming altar numb.

Ah ! desolate hour when that shall be,
When dew and sunlight, rain and wind,
Shall seem but trivial things to thee,
Unloved, unheeded, undivined ;
Nay, rather let that morning find
Thy molten soul exhaled and gone,
Than in a living death resigned
So darkly still to labour on.



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